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THE CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT

ETC.

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THE
CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT
AND OTHER TALES

BY
WALTER BESANT AND JAMES RICE



LIBRARY EDITION

London
CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1888

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P R E F A C E

WHEN Jules Janin once published a collection of tales, which, as he modestly owned, would leave nothing behind them when once read, he asked himself why he was putting them together for publication. And the best answer he could find was, "C'est son Altesse ma Vanité qui le veut ainsi." He goes on to say that the reader may be very well content with this motive, "qui est le grand fond de tous les caractères et de toutes les œuvres d'ici-bas."

"Son Altesse ma Vanité" frequently tries to conceal himself. His voice may be recognised, however, though his features are behind a mask, when he says that his publishers have insisted on the collection of his stories, or that they are issued in response to the earnest solicitation of friends, or in the hope that the work may "be useful in a wider circle," or that they may be "blessed for good," or that they may extend knowledge of the principles for which the gifted and disinterested author is ready to become a second Saint Lawrence if necessary.

No legion of friends have urged upon us the necessity of giving these tales another chance of immortality—our friends, indeed, are chiefly concerned about their own immortality. Nor do we look to see the following stories work for good, being quite satisfied with the belief that they will work for no harm. On the other hand, if the moral be found to be so good that the Board schools will adopt the work for a textbook, we shall be pleased. But there are no principles advocated, because the authors themselves have none.

These tales have all appeared before. "The Case of Mr.

Lucraft," which came out as one of a series of short tales in the *World*, has been re-written, and now contains many additional details of Mr. Lucraft's surprising adventures, which we had to leave out for want of space in the former appearance of the narrative. We venture to present this singular experience as worthy to be compared with that of Peter Schlemyl, the Shadowless. "Titania's Farewell" is based upon certain well-known lines in Hood's "Midsummer Fairies."

Always "son Altesse ma Vanité," and nothing else? Perhaps not quite. There is one other motive which induces men to write, to publish, to pray for favour at the hands of critics, to hope that subscribers to Smith and Mudie will read and recommend others to read their books. Every man who has a thing to sell, whether it be the offspring of his brain, or something he has bought from others, or something he has planted in the earth and watched while it slowly grew and ripened, will understand what that motive is, and appreciate its force. Perhaps, as a motive influence, it is even stronger than "son Altesse ma Vanité."

W. B.
J. R.

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PART I.

From the Supernatural.

THE CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT.

CHAPTER I.

I HAVE more than once told the story of the only remarkable thing which ever happened to me in the course of a longish life, but as no one ever believed me, I left off telling it. I wish, therefore, to leave behind me a truthful record, in which everything shall be set down, as near as I can remember it, just as it happened. I am sure I need not add a single fact. The more I consider the story, the more I realise to myself my wonderful escape and the frightful consequences which a providential accident averted from my head, the more reason I feel to be grateful and humble.

I have read of nothing similar to my own case. I have consulted books on apparitions, witchcraft, and the power of the devil as manifested in authentic history, but I have found absolutely nothing that can in any way compare with my own case. If there be any successor to my Mr. Ebenezer Grumbelow, possessed of his unholy powers, endowed with his fiendish resolve and his diabolical iniquity of selfishness, this plain and simple narrative may serve as a warning to young men situated as I was in the year 1823. Except as a moral example, indeed, I see no use in telling the story at all.

I have never been a rich man, but I was once very poor, and it is of this period that I have to write.

As for my parentage, it was quite obscure. My mother died when I was still a boy; and my father, who was not a man to be proud of as a father, had long before run away from her and disappeared. He was a sailor by profession,

and I have heard it rumoured that sailors of his time possessed a wife in every port, besides a few who lived, like my mother, inland ; so that they could vary the surroundings when they wished. The wives were all properly married in church too, and honest women, every one of them. What became of my father I never knew, nor did I ever inquire.

I went through a pretty fair number of adventures before I settled down to my first serious profession. I was travelling companion and drudge to an itinerant tinker, who treated me as kindly as could be expected when he was sober. When he was drunk he used to throw the pots and pans at my head. Then I became a cabin-boy, but only for a single voyage, on board a collier. The ship belonged to a philanthropist, who was too much occupied with the wrongs of the West Indian niggers to think about the rights of his own sailors ; so his ships, insured far above their real value, were sent to sea to sink or swim as it might please Providence. I suppose no cabin-boy ever had so many kicks and cuffs in a single voyage as I had. However, my ship carried me safely from South Shields to the port of London. There I ran away, and I heard afterwards that on her return voyage the *Spanking Sally* foundered with all hands. In the minds of those who knew the captain and his crew personally, there were doubtless, as in mine, grave fears as to their ultimate destination. After that I became steward in an Atlantic sailing packet for a couple of years ; then clerk to a bogus auctioneer in New York ; cashier to a store ; all sorts of things, but nothing long. Then I came back to England, and not knowing what to do with myself, joined a strolling company of actors in the general utility line. It was not exactly promotion, but I liked the life ; I liked the work ; I liked the applause ; I liked wandering about from town to town ; I even liked, being young and a fool, the precarious nature of the salary. Heaven knows mine was small enough ; but we were a cheery company, and one or two members subsequently rose to distinction. If we had known any history, which we did not, we might have remembered that Molière himself was once a stroller through France. Some

people think it philosophical to reflect, when they are hard up, how many great men have been hard up too. It would have brought no comfort to me. Practically I felt little inconvenience from poverty, save in the matter of boots. We went share and share alike, most of us, and there was always plenty to eat even for my naturally gigantic appetite. Juliet always used to reckon me as equal to four.

Juliet was the manager's daughter — Juliet Kerrans, acting as Miss Juliet Alvanley. She was eighteen and I was twenty-three, an inflammable and romantic time of life. We were thrown a good deal together too, not only off the stage but on it. I was put into parts to play up to her. I was Romeo when she played her namesake, a part sustained by her mother till even she herself was bound to own that she was too fat to play it any longer; she was Lady Teazle and I was Charles Surface; she was Rosalind and I Orlando; she was Miranda and I Ferdinand; she was Angelina and I Sir Harry Wildair. We were a pair, and looked well in love scenes. Looking back dispassionately on our performances, I suppose they must have been as bad as stage-acting could well be. At least, we had no training, and nothing but a few fixed rules to guide us; these, of course, quite stagey and conventional. Juliet had been on the stage all her life, and did not want in assurance; I, however, was nervous and uncertain. Then we were badly mounted and badly dressed; we were ambitious, we ranted, and we tore a passion to rags. But we had one or two good points—we were young and lively. Juliet had the most charming of faces and the most delicious of figures—mind you, in the year 1823, girls had a chance of showing their figures without putting on a page's costume. Then she had a soft, sweet voice, and pretty little coquettish ways, which came natural to her, and broke through the clumsy stage artificialities. She drew full houses; wherever we performed, all the men, especially all the young officers, used to come after her. They wrote her notes, they lay in wait for her, they sent her flowers; but what with old Kerrans and myself, to say nothing of the other members

of the company, they might as well have tried to get at a Peri in Paradise. I drew pretty well too. I was—a man of seventy and more may say so without being accused of vanity—I was a good-looking young fellow; you would hardly believe what quantities of letters and *billets-doux* came to me. I had dozens, but Juliet found and tore them all up. There they were; the note on rose-coloured note-paper with violet ink, beginning with “Handsomest and noblest of men,” and ending with “Your fair unknown, Araminta.” There was the letter from the middle-aged widow with a taste for the drama and an income; and there was the vilely spelled note from the foolish little milliner who had fallen in love with the Romeo of a barn. Perhaps ladies are more sensible now. At all events, their letters were thrown away upon me, because I was in love already, head over ears, and with Juliet.

Juliet handed over her notes to her father, who found out their writers, and made them take boxes and bespeak plays. So that all Juliet’s lovers got was the privilege of paying more than other people, for the girl was as good as she was pretty—a rarer combination of qualities on the stage fifty years ago than now. She was tall and, in those days, slender. Later on she took after her mother; but who would have thought that so graceful a girl would ever arrive at fourteen stone? Her eyes and hair were black—eyes that never lost their lustre; and hair which, though it turned grey in later years, was then like a silken net, when it was let down, to catch the hearts of lovers. Of course she knew that she was pretty; what pretty woman does not? and of course, too, she did not know and would not understand the power of her own beauty; what pretty woman does? And because it was the very worst thing she could do for herself, she fell in love with me.

Her father knew it and meant to stop it from the beginning: but he was not a man to do things in a hurry, and so we went on in a fool’s paradise, enjoying the stolen kisses, and talking of the sweet time to come when we should be married. One night—I was Romeo—I was so carried away

with passion that I acted for once naturally and unconventionally. There was a full house; the performance was so much out of the common that the people were astonished and forgot to applaud. Juliet caught the infection of my passion, and for once we acted well, because we acted from the heart. Never but that once, I believe, has Romeo and Juliet been performed by a pair who felt every word they said. It was only in a long, low room, a sort of corn exchange or town hall, in a little country town, but the memory of that night is sacred to me.

You know the words—

“ See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand !
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek ! ”

And these—

“ O, for a falconer’s voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again !
Bondage is hoarse and may not speak aloud,
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies,
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine
With repetition of my Romeo ! ”

Splendidly we gave them.

Why, even now, old as I am, the recollection of these lines and the thought of that night warm my heart still and fire my feeble pulses. I have taught them to my grandchild. She takes after my poor Juliet, and would succeed on the stage, if only her father would let her. But he is straight-laced. Ah ! he should have seen the temptations which beset a girl on the stage in my time. We are Puritans now, almost——

And a good thing, too. It is time for me to own it.

Well — old Kerrans was in the front, looking after the money, as usual, and always with one eye on the stage, to see how his daughter was getting on. He was puzzled, I think, to make out the meaning of the unaccustomed fire, but he came to the conclusion that if Juliet was going to remain Miss Juliet, instead of becoming Mrs. Mortimer Vavas seur (my stage name), he had better interfere at once.

So after the play, and over the domestic supper-table, he had it out with his daughter.

Juliet swore that nothing should induce her to marry another man.

"Bless the girl!" said her father; "I don't want you to marry anybody at all."

Juliet declared that she never, never would forget me.

"I don't want you to forget him," Mr. Kerrans replied. "Remember him as much as you like."

Juliet announced her intention of retiring from the stage and going into a convent. There were no convents in England in 1823, so that the threat was not so serious as it would be now.

Her father promised her that when the company passed by any respectable convent on the road, he would certainly knock at the door and inquire about the accommodation and the terms.

"Lor!" he said, caressing his weeping daughter, "do you think I want to be cruel to you, my pretty? Not a bit. Let young Lucraft go and prove himself a man, and he shall have you. But, you see, it wouldn't do to add to the expenses of the company just now, with business so bad and all, would it, my dear? Why, you might be confined in a twelvemonth, and laid by for half the year ever after, with a troop of young children. Where should we be then?"

The next day was Saturday. As usual, I went into the treasury to draw my money, and found the old fellow with rather a red face, and a hesitation in his manner.

He told me the whole story, just as I have told it to you. And then he gave me my dismissal.

"Look here," he said, handing me the money, "you are a capital young fellow, Lucraft, and a likely actor. There's merit in you. But I can't have you spoiling my Juliet for the stage. So I'm going to put her up without you. After a bit I daresay I shall find another Romeo. You get away to London and find another engagement—there's a week's pay in advance—and when Juliet is married, or when you get rich, or when anything happens to make things different,

why, you see, we shall all be glad to see you back. Go and make your farewells to Juliet, and don't be more sentimental than you can help. Good-bye, my boy, and good luck to you."

Good luck! Had he known the kind of luck which awaited me!

I sought my girl and found her crying. I remember that we forgot all the fine verses of Shakespeare, and just put our faces close to each other and cried together.

It did seem hard upon both of us. We were really and truly in love, and that in a good, honest, determined way. To me there was no other girl in the world except Juliet. To her there was no other man besides Luke Lucraft. We had come to an understanding for three months, and had been quietly dropping deeper and deeper in love during all that time.

And now we were to part.

"Don't forget me, dear Luke," she sobbed. "There are lots of prettier and finer girls in the world than I am, who will try to take away your love from me. I wish I could kill the creatures!" she added, stamping her foot.

Juliet always had a high and generous spirit. I like women to have a high spirit.

"And will you have no admirers, Juliet?" I replied. "Why, half the town"—we were in Lancaster then—"half the town is at your feet already. I intercepted two love-letters yesterday, and I kicked the grocer's apprentice the day before for trying to get Mrs. Mould to give you a *billet-doux* from himself. Come, dear, we will trust one another. I will try and prove myself a man—get an engagement, make a name on the London stage, and come back with money and an offer to act Romeo to your Juliet, at Drury Lane. Think of that, my dearest, and dry your eyes. Your father does not object to me, you know; he only wants me to make an income. Come, Juliet, let us say good-bye. It is only for a short time, and I shall come back with all sorts of reasons in my pocket for persuading your father's consent."

So we parted, with many more promises of trust and fidelity, and after breaking a sixpenny-bit between us. Juliet's piece is buried with her; mine is hanging at my heart, and will be, before long, buried with me beside her.

Oh! the weary journey to London in those days, especially outside the coach, and for a poor man not encumbered with too many wraps. However, I arrived at length, and found myself in the streets that are supposed to be paved with gold, with a couple of sovereigns in my pocket.

But I was brimful of hope. London was a kindly step-mother, who received adopted sons by the thousand, and led them to fame and wealth. I thought of Garrick, of Dick Whittington, and all the rest who came up to town poorer, far poorer than myself, and took comfort. I secured a lodging at a modest rent, and made my way to Drury Lane—the stage door.

I found no opening at Drury Lane; not even a vacancy for a supernumerary. There were not many London theatres in 1823, and I found the same thing everywhere—more applications than places to give.

I tried the Greenwich and the Richmond theatres with the same ill-success.

Then I endeavoured to get a country engagement, but I even failed there. I had no friends to recommend me, and my single experience with Kerrans's strolling troupe did not tell so much in my favour as I had hoped.

My ambition naturally took a town flight. I had intended to make my appearance on the metropolitan stage as Romeo, my favourite part, and at once to take the town by storm. I was prepared to give them an intelligent and novel interpretation of Hamlet. And I was not unwilling to undertake Macbeth, Othello, or even Prince Hal.

When these hopes became evidently grounded on nothing but the baseless fabrication of a dream, I resolved on beginning with second parts. Horatio, Mercutio, Paris, were, after all, characters worthy the work of a rising artist.

Again there seemed no chance.

The stage always wants young men of general utility. I

would go anywhere and take anything. I offered to do so, but although hopes were held out to me by the theatrical agent, somehow he had nothing at the moment in his gift. Nothing: not even a vacancy for a tragedian at Richardson's Show; not even a chance for Bartholomew Fair.

It took me a fortnight to run down the scale from Hamlet, say, to Francis the warder. While I passed through this descending gamut of ambition, my two sovereigns were melting away with a rapidity quite astonishing.

The rent took five shillings: that was paid in advance. Then I was extravagant in the matter of eating, and took three meals a day, finding that not enough to satisfy my vigorous appetite. Once or twice, too, I paid for admission to the pit, and saw, with a sinking heart, what real acting means. My heart failed, because I perceived that I had to begin all over again, and from the very bottom of the ladder.

Then I had to buy a new pair of boots. It was always a trouble to me, the rapid wearing out of leather.

And then there was something else; and then one morning I found myself without a sixpence in my pocket. And then I began for the first time to become seriously alarmed about the future.

I had one or two things which I could pawn—a watch, a waistcoat, a few odds and ends in the way of wardrobe, and a few books—on the proceeds of them I lived for a whole week; but at last, after spending twopence in the purchase of a penny loaf and a saveloy for breakfast, I found myself not only penniless, but also without the means of procuring another penny at all, because I had nothing left to pawn.

Many a young fellow has found himself in a similar predicament, but I doubt whether any one ever became so desperately hungry as I did on that day. I recollect that, having rashly eaten up my sausage before eight o'clock, I felt a sinking towards twelve; it was aggravated by the savoury smell of roast meat which steamed from the cook-shops and dining-rooms as I walked along the streets. About one o'clock I gazed with malignant envy on the happy clerks who could go in and order platefuls of the roast and

boiled which smoked in the windows, and threw a perfume more delicious than the sweetest strains of music into the streets where I lingered and looked. And at two I observed the diners come out again, walking more slowly, but with an upright and satisfied air, while I—the sinking had been succeeded by a dull gnawing pain—was slowly doubling up. At half-past two I felt as if I could bear it no longer. I had been walking about, trying different offices for a clerkship. I might as well have asked for a partnership. But I could walk no more. I leaned against a post—it was in Bucklersbury—opposite a dining-room, where hares, fowls, and turkeys were piled in the window among a boundless prodigality and wealth of carrots, turnips, and cauliflowers, till my senses swam at the contemplation. I longed for a caldron in which to put the whole contents of the shop front, and eat them at one Gargantuan repast. My appetite, already alluded to, was hereditary; one of the few things I can remember of my mother was a constant complaint that my father used to eat her out of house and home. To be sure, from other scraps of information handed down by tradition, I have reason to believe that the word eating was used as a figure of speech—the part for the whole—and included drinking. I was good at both, and as a trencherman I had been unsurpassed, as I said above, in the company, the dear old company among whom I have so often eaten beefsteak and fried onions with Juliet. The door of the place opened now and then to let a hungry man enter or a full man go out, and I caught a glimpse of the interior. Dining-rooms were not called restaurants in those days. They had no gilding, no bright paint, no pretty barmaids, and no silver-plated forks and spoons. Nor were they brilliant with gas. All London—that is, all working London—dined before four o'clock; the clerks from twelve to two, and the principals, except a few of the bigwigs, from two to four. The cheaper rooms were like one or two places still to be found in Fleet Street. There were sanded floors; there were hard benches; you had your beer out of pewter, not plated tankards; there was no cheap claret, and the

popular ideal of wine was a strong and fiery port. Also, candles stood upon the tables—not wax candles, but tallow, with long wicks which required snuffing. They dropped a good deal of mutton fat about the table, and it was not uncommon to find yourself eating a little tallow with your bread, which was not nice even to men of a strong stomach. Finally, you had steel forks, which are just as good, to my thinking, as plated silver, and more easily cleaned.

I stood by the post and watched with hungry eyes. From within I heard voices, stifled voices, as those sent up a pipe, calling for roast beef with plenty of brown—good heavens! plenty of brown; roast mutton, underdone—I loved my mutton underdone; boiled beef with suet-pudding and fat—I always took a great deal of pudding and fat with my boiled beef; roast veal and bacon with stuffing—a dish for the gods; calves' head for two—I could have eaten calves' head for a dozen; with orders pointing to things beyond my hungry imagination—hunger limits the boundaries of fancy—puddings, fish, soup, cheese, and such delicacies. Alas! I wanted the solids. I felt myself growing feebler; I became more and more doubled up; I had thoughts of entering this paradise of the hungry, and, after eating till I could eat no longer, calmly laying down my knife and fork and informing the waiter that I had no money. There was a farce in which I had once played where the comic actor sent for the landlord, after a hearty meal, and asked him what he would do in case a stranger, after ordering and eating his dinner, should declare his inability to pay. "Do, sir?" cried the host; "I should kick him across the street." "Landlord," said the low comedian, and it always told—"Landlord," he used to rise up slowly as he spoke, and solemnly draw aside his coat-tails, turning his face in the direction of the street-door—"landlord, I'll trouble you." I used to play the landlord.

It struck half-past three; the dead gnawing of hunger was followed by a sharp pain, irritating and much more unpleasant. The crowd of those who entered had been followed by the crowd of those who came out, and the heaven

of hungry men was nearly empty again. I gazed still upon the turkeys and the hares, but with a lack-lustre eye, for I was nearly fainting.

Presently there came down the street an elderly gentleman, bearing before him, like a Lord Mayor in a French tale, his enormous abdomen: he had white hair, white eyebrows, white whiskers, and a purple face. He walked very slowly, as if the exertion might prove apoplectic, and leaned upon a thick stick. As he passed the shop he looked in at the window and wagged his head. At that moment I groaned involuntarily. He turned round and surveyed me. I suppose I presented a strange appearance, leaning against the post, with stooping figure and tightly-buttoned coat. He had big projecting eyes flushed with red veins, which gave him a wolfish expression.

"Young man," he said, not benignantly at all, but severely, "you look ill. Have you been drinking?"

I shook my head.

"I am only hungry," I said, telling the truth because I was too far gone to hide it, "I am only hungry: that is the matter with me."

He planted his stick on the ground, supporting both his hands upon the gold head, and wagged his head again from side to side with a grunting sound in his throat like the sawing of bones.

Grunt! "Here's a pretty fellow for you!" Grunt! "Hungry, and he looks miserable." Grunt! "Hungry, and he groans." Grunt! "Hungry—the most enviable position a man can be in—and he dares to repine at his lot." Grunt! "What are the lower classes coming to next, I wonder? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Aren't you a model of everything that is ungrateful and"—grunt!—"and flying in the face of Providence? He lives in a land of victuals. London is a gigantic caravan, full of the most splendid things, the most glorious things, to eat and drink; it only wants an appetite; and he's got that, and he laments!"

"What is the use of an appetite if you have no money to satisfy it with?"

Grunt! "Is it a small appetite as a rule, or is it a large appetite?"

"Large," I replied. "It is an awkward thing for a poor beggar like me to have such a devil of a twist. I was born with it. Very awkward just now."

"Come with me, young man," he grunted. "Go before me. Don't talk, because that may interfere with the further growth of your appetite. Walk slowly, and keep your mouth shut close."

He came behind me, walking with his chuckle and grunt.

"So. What a fine young fellow it is!" Grunt! "What room for the development of the Alderman's Arch! What a backbone for the support of a stomach! What shoulders for a dinner-table, and what legs to put under it! Heavens! what a dinner might be made of this boy if he only had money." Grunt! "Youth and appetite—health and hunger—and all thrown away upon a pauper! What a thing, what a thing! This way, young man."

Turning down a court leading out of Bucklersbury, he guided me to a door, a little black portal, at which he stopped; then stooping to a keyhole of smaller size than was generally used in those days, he seemed to me to blow into it with his mouth; this was absurd, of course, but it seemed so to me. The door opened. He led the way into a passage, which, when the door shut behind us, as it did of its own accord, was pitch dark. We went up some stairs, and on the first landing the old gentleman, who was wheezing and puffing tremendously, opened another door, and led me into a room. It was a large room, resplendent with the light of at least forty wax candles. The centre was occupied by a large dining-table laid for a single person. Outside it was broad daylight, for it was not yet four o'clock.

"Sit down, young man, sit down," puffed my host. "Oh dear! oh dear! Sit down, do. I wish I was as hungry as you."

I sat down in the nearest chair, and looked round the room. The first thing I remarked was that I could not see the door by which we had been admitted. The room was

octagonal, and on every side stood some heavy piece of furniture; a table with glass, a case of bookshelves, a sofa, but no door. My head began to go round as I continued my observations. There was no window either, nor was there any fireplace. Then I felt a sudden giddiness, and I suppose I fell backwards on my chair. It was partly the faintness of hunger, but partly it was the strange room, and that old man glaring at me with his great wolfish eyes.

When I recovered I was lying on a sofa, and soft cold fingers were bathing my head, and pressing a perfumed handkerchief to my lips. I opened my eyes suddenly and sat up completely recovered. At the foot of the sofa stood my entertainer.

"Easy with him, Boule-de-neige; make him rest for a moment. Perhaps his hunger has been too much for him."

I turned to see who Boule-de-neige was. He was a negro of the blackest type, as ancient and withered as some old ourang of tropical woods; his cheeks hung in folds, and his skin seemed too much for his attenuated body; his wool was white, and his gums were almost toothless; and his nose so flattened with age as to be almost invisible, looking at him as I was looking, in profile. His hands were as soft as any woman's, but icy cold; and his eyes were red and fiery.

"Boule-de-neige, what do you think of him?"

"Him berry fine young man, massa: him beautiful young man; got lubly abbatite develoffed, I tink; him last long time, much longer time dan last oder young man. Cluck! Him poor trash, dat young man; dam poor trash; use up and go to debbel in a month. Cluck! Dis young man got lubly stumjack, strong as bull. Cluck-cluck! How much you tink him eat to-night?"

"We shall see, Boule-de-neige. We will try him with a simple dinner, and then pronounce on his performances. Young men do not always come up to their professions. But he looks well, and perhaps, Boule-de-neige—perhaps—ah!" He nodded with a deep sigh.

"What time massa dine himself?"

"I don't know," the old gentleman answered, with another

heavy sigh. "Perhaps not till nine o'clock; perhaps not, then. It all depends on this youth. Vanish, *Boule-de-neigel*, and serve."

There was evidently something in my host's mind by the way he sighed. Why did it depend upon me? And did *Boule-de-neige* go through the floor? Did the table sink when he disappeared, and come up loaded with dishes? It seemed so.

I sprang from the couch. The sight and smell of the food brought back my raging hunger.

"Let me eat!" I cried.

"You shall. One moment first—only a single moment. Young man. Tell me again and explicitly the nature and extent of your appetite. Be truthful, oh, be truthful! Our little tongues should never lie for mutton-chop or apple-pie. You know the hymn. I hope you have been religiously brought up, and know that hymn."

"I've got a devil of an appetite. What is there to lie about?"

"My dear young friend, there are many kinds of appetites. Yours may be fierce at first and promise great things, and then end in a miserably small performance. I have known such, and mourned to see them. Is it a lasting appetite, now? Is it steady through a long dinner? Is it regular in its recurrence?"

"You shall see something of my performance," I laughed, insensate wretch. "You shall see. I never had a long dinner in my life, because I always made short work of mine. It is steady through a good many pounds of steak, and as regular as a clock."

"That is always something. Steak is as healthy a test as I know. Is it, secondly, an appetite that recovers itself quickly? That is very important. Is it a day-by-day or an hour-by-hour appetite? Is it good at all times of the day?"

"Alas, I wish it were not!"

"Hush, young man; do not blaspheme! Tell me, if you eat your fill now—it is half-past four—when do you think you might be ready again?" His eyes glistened like a

couple of great rubies in the candlelight, and his hands trembled.

"I should say about eight. But I might do something light at seven, I daresay. Just now I feel as if I could eat a mountain."

"He feels as if he could eat a mountain! Wonderful are the gifts of Providence! My dear young friend, I am very thankful—deeply thankful—that I met you. Sit down, and let me take the covers off for you; I long to see you eat. This is a blessed day—a truly blessed day! I will wait upon you myself. No one else. *Boule-de-neige*, vanish!"

As he was about to take off the covers he stopped short.

"Stay. You are without occupation?"

"I can get none."

"You are of any trade?"

"I am an actor."

"A bad trade—an un-Christian trade. Actors are vagabonds by Act of Parliament. Actors can never be in a state of grace. I shall be happy in being a humble instrument in removing you from a calling fatal to the Christian warrior. Why did you leave your last situation? No dishonesty? No embezzlement? No tampering with accounts?"

"Sir, I have always been an honest man. And, besides, I have never been tempted by the handling of other people's money."

"Ha! You have got no wife?"

"No, sir; I am unmarried."

"You have got no—— I trust I am taking to my bosom no deceiver of women. You are not the father of an illegitimate offspring, I hope and pray."

"No, sir; I am not."

"Young man, you are about to enter upon a most serious act, perhaps the most serious act of your life, and these questions may appear to you trivial and tedious. As a Christian, and a member of the congregation of Mr.— But never mind; you are hungry now, and wish to eat. We will talk after dinner."

He took off the covers. The table was spread with a dozen

different dishes, all served up together. Others, I noticed, standing with bottles and decanters, on a large sideboard. As my generous benefactor removed the silver covers, his face, which had assumed during his questioning an austere gravity, suddenly lit up, and he laughed as the perfume of the hot food mounted to his nostrils. He seemed all at once a different man.

"Gently, gently, my dear young friend. Here is a dinner fit for a king; fit for *me*, if I could eat it. Oh! my dainty Boule-de-neige! Ha! is it right to waste such a dinner upon a youth whose only dreams are of a sufficiency of steak? Young man, in after years—ahem!—in after days you will remember this dinner. You will recall every item in this delicious bill of fare which Boule-de-neige has set before you. Let me teach you to eat it properly. Weigh you morsels."

Heaven! how I cursed his delay. He kept one great hand between me and the dishes, for fear, I suppose, that I should pounce upon them and clear them off all at once.

"Patience, patience. Consider each mouthful. Try to be thankful that cooks have brought their divine art to such perfection. Carry back your thoughts to—grunt—to time when all mankind fed upon imperfectly cooked steak. Think that all the treasures of the East and West have been ransacked to furnish for me this meal, and that you will never, never, never see such a dinner again as long as you live."

At all events, I never saw such a meal again as long as *he* lived.

"We will now," he said, with a backward wave of his right hand, "consider dinner as a science."

"Oh, sir!" I exclaimed, "I am so hungry."

"It's beautiful to see you hungry, but I must not let you hurry. Eat as much as you like when you begin, but gently, gently—easily and gently. Think of the future. Think of ME."

I stared at him in wonder.

"Think of you, sir?"

"Why, what would happen to me if you really destroyed your appetite, or even yourself in swallowing a bone?"

I thought he must be mad.

"Young man," he went on, "you will say a grace before meat, if you remember one."

I did not.

"Then I will say one for you. Oh! wretched trade of stage acting. He does not even know a single grace before meat."

Then he began to help me—and we went on with dinner without further interruption. He kept up a running accompaniment of comment as I devoured the meal, and his manner gradually lost all its solemnity, until before I was more than half through the dinner he was dancing about, slapping his leg with delight, and laughing till he grew almost black in the face.

Why he was so pleased I could not tell. I was soon to learn.

"These are plovers' eggs. No better thing ever discovered to begin your dinner with. Alderman Stowport says oysters are better. That is rubbish. I do not despise oysters—Why, he has eaten the whole six! Bravo! bravo! an excellent beginning. Let me take away the plate, my dear sir. Now we have turtle soup—gently, my young friend, gently. Ah, impetuous youth! More? Stay—green fat. Humour, humour your appetite; don't drive it; calipash and calipee. It's really sinful to eat so fast. He takes all down without tasting it. No—no more; you must give yourself a fair chance, and not spoil your dinner with too much turtle." He put the soup aside, and took the cover off another dish. "Salmon—with cucumber. Lobster-sauce—bless me, it's like a dream of fairyland! Fillet of sole—a beautiful dream to see him. Ho! ho! he's a Julius Cæsar the Conqueror. Croquet de volaille—gone like a cloud from the sky. Don't wolf the food, my friend; there is a limit to the cravings of nature imposed by the claims of art; taste it. Ris de veau—smiles of the dear little innocent, confiding calf—a little more bread with it? Mauviettes en caisse, larks in baskets—sweet, rapturous, singing larks, toothsome cockyolly larks. He eats them up, bones and all. Ha! ha! Pause, my dear sir, and drink something. Here are champagne, hock, and

sauterne ; never touch sherry, it's a made-up wine, even the best of it. Come, a little Champagne."

"I generally take draught-beer, sir," I replied modestly. "That is the drink to which I have been accustomed and—not too much of it; but, if you please, a little fizz will be acceptable."

I drank three glasses in rapid succession, and found them good. He meanwhile nodded and winked with an ever-increasing delight which I failed to understand.

"Now, my Nero, my Paris of Troy, my Judas Maccabæus"—he mixed up his names, but it mattered nothing—"here is saddle of mutton, with potatoes, cauliflower, currant-jelly. More champagne? It's worth *sums* of money to see him. Curry? More champagne? Curry of chicken? Cabob curry of chicken, young Alexander the Great? Plenty of rice? Ho, ho, ho! Plenty of rice, he said; why, he is a Goliath—a Goliath of Gath, this young man!"

He really grew so purple that I thought he would have a fit of some kind. But the flattery pleased me all the same, and I went on eating and drinking as if I was only just beginning.

"Quail or bécassine—snipe, that is? He takes both, like Pompey. More champagne? Jelly, my Heliogabalus, my modern Caracalla, apricot-jelly? Cabinet pudding? He has two helpings of the pudding. King Solomon in all his glory never—More Champagne? A little hock to finish with? He takes his hock in a tumbler, this young Samson. Cheese—Brie—and celery. A glass of port with the cheese. He takes that in a tumbler too, like Og, King of Bashan."

I was really overwhelmed with the splendour of the dinner, the classical and biblical flattery, and the extraordinary gratification which my really enormous hunger caused this remarkable old gentleman. He clapped his hands; he nodded his head; he slapped his legs: he winked and grinned; he smacked his lips; he evinced every sign of the most unbounded delight. When I had quite finished eating, which was not before we had got through the whole list of courses, he gave me a bottle of claret, and watched me while

I rapidly disposed of it. Then he produced from a sideboard, where I certainly had not seen it a moment before, a small cup of strong black coffee with a tiny glass of liqueur. As for my own part, I hope I have made it clear that I dined extremely well; in fact, I had never even dreamed of such a dinner in my life. It was not only that I was half starved, but that the things were so good. Imagine the astonishment of a young strolling actor, whose highest dreams were of sufficient beefsteak, not of the primeest part, at such a magnificent feed. I felt as if I had dropped unexpectedly into a fortune. I had.

"How do you feel now?" my host asked, a shade of anxiety crossing his brow.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was still the strange look in my host's eyes—a sort of passionate and eager longing.

"I am very well, thank you, sir, and more grateful than I can tell you."

"Hang the gratitude! Tell me if you feel any sense of repletion? Does the blood seem mounting to the head? Are you quite free from any giddiness? No thickness in the speech? It's wonderful, it's providential, my finding you. Such a windfall; and just when I most wanted it. Our blessings truly come when we least expect them."

This was strange language, but the whole proceedings were so strange that I hardly noticed it. Besides, I was extremely comfortable after my dinner, and disposed to rest.

"Now," he went on, "while you are digesting—by the way, the digestion is, I trust, unimpaired by drink or excess? Quite so; and what I expected in so good and so gifted a young man. Like an ostrich, as you say. Ho, ho! ha! ha! like an ostrich! It is, indeed, too much. Tell me, now, something, gently and dispassionately, so as not to injure your digestion, about your history."

I told him all. While I related my simple story he inter-

rupted now and then with some fresh question on the growth, the endurance, the regularity of my appetite, to which I gave satisfactory answers. When I had quite finished he went to the table—I noticed then that all traces of the dinner had disappeared—and laid out a document, by which he placed a pen. Then he drew a chair, sat down in front of me, and assumed a serious air.

"Come," he said, peremptorily, "let us get now to business."

I had not the smallest notion what the business was, but I bowed and waited. Perhaps he was going to offer me a clerkship. Visions of a large salary, to suit my expansive appetite, came across my brain.

"In your case," he began, "the possession of so great an appetite must be attended with serious inconveniences. You have no money, in a few hours you will be hungry again; you will endure great pain and suffering, greater than is felt by men less largely endowed with the greatest blessing—I mean with appetite."

"Yes," I said, "it is a great trouble to me, this twist of mine, especially when I am hard up."

He almost jumped out of his chair.

"Why there," he cried, "what is the use of words? We are agreed already. Nothing could be more fortunate. Let us have no more beating about the bush. Young man, I will rid you of this nuisance; I will buy your appetite of you."

I only stared. Was the old gentleman mad?

"It is a strange offer, I know," he went on, "a strange offer, and you have probably never heard a more remarkable one. But it is genuine. I will buy your appetite of you."

"Buy my—buy my appetite?"

"Nothing easier. Read this."

He gave me the paper which he had laid on the table, prepared in readiness, I suppose, for me. It was as follows:

"I, Luke Lucraft, being in sound mind and in good health, and of the mature age of twenty-four, do voluntarily and of my own free will and accord agree and promise to resign my appetite entirely and altogether for the use of

Ebenezer Grumbelow from the day and hour of the execution of this deed. In return whereof I agree to accept a monthly allowance of £30, also to date from the moment of signature, with a sum of £50, to be placed in my hands. I promise also that I will carefully study to preserve by regular habits and exercise the gift of a generous appetite; that I will not work immoderately, sit up late, practise vicious courses, or do anything that may tend to impair the regular recurrence of a healthy and vigorous hunger."

Then followed a place for the signature and one for the witnesses.

"You see," he went on, "I ask for no unpleasant condition. I give you a free life, coupled with the simple condition of ordinary care. Do you agree?"

"I hardly know; it is so sudden."

"Come, come"—he spoke with a harshness quite new—"come, let us have no nonsense of that sort. Do you agree?"

I read it over again.

"Give me a little time," I said. "Let me reflect till to-morrow morning."

"Reflect!" His face flushed purple, and his bloodshot eyes literally glared. "Reflect! what the devil does the boy want to reflect about? Has he got a penny, a friend, or a chance in the whole world? I will give you five minutes—come." He rose up and stood before me. As I looked in his face a curious dimness came over my eyes; he seemed to recede before me; he disappeared altogether. When I heard him speak again his voice sounded far, far off, but thin and clear, as if it came through some long tube. "Luke Lucraft," it said, "see yourself."

Yes; I saw myself, and though *outside* of what I saw, I felt the same emotions as if I had been the actual performer in the scenes I witnessed.

I was standing where the old gentleman met me, starving still, and suffering pangs far worse than those under which I groaned at three o'clock. The day was advanced; the diners had all gone away, and the dining-room waiters were putting up the shutters. I spoke to one of them timidly. I told

him I had eaten nothing since the morning, and begged for a plate of broken victuals. He looked in my face, called a brother-servant, and they kicked me from the door. People were rougher in London fifty years ago. Then I slunk away, and wandered somewhere among the winding streets and lanes of the old city. London at night was not so empty and deserted as it is now, and the streets had people in them. Some of them were well dressed—the wealthy merchants had not, even then, all left off living in the city; some were clerks going home; some were women out for an evening's walk. The bells rang out the hours from the city clocks, and I crept along the walls wondering what would become of me, and how I should find an end of my present misery.

Then I begged. Took off my hat and held it in my hand while I asked for something—anything—the smallest coin that would get a piece of bread.

The men passed me by with pitiless and unbelieving eyes. Heavens! if they had been hungry once, only once, in all their lives, they would never again have refused the petition of a beggar, even though he was the most lying mendicant who ever disgraced the words of charity which passed his lips. But they gave me nothing.

The women edged away from me and passed on the other side if I timidly pressed my claim. They had nothing to fear from me. At last I asked a girl. She was more unfortunate than myself, but she was not hungry, and she gave me a shilling.

Then I found a shop open, and bought a plate of meat. That spent—I saw myself slinking, ashamed and wretched, again along the cold and empty street. When I could walk no more I found myself in Covent Garden Market, and threw myself under shelter of a roof at least, among the stalks and leaves and straw which littered the place.

I awoke early, and hungry again. I rose and resumed my miserable walk.

Hope by this time was dead within me; I could think of nothing but my intolerable hunger; could feel nothing but

the pain which would not leave me; could look at nothing but food in the window.

I begged again, and begged all day without success.

It was a rougher time, that, than the present. More than one man laid his stick across my back with an impatient admonition to get to work, you lazy rogue. But I was too feeble to retaliate or remonstrate. Was there no charity in the world? I passed other beggars in the streets who looked fat and comfortable. People gave *them* money, but they would give me none. The time wore on, and my craving for food became irresistible.

I passed a shop which had a tray outside of baked potatoes. The owner had his back to me. I *stole* one. Yes, I stole one. No one saw me. He did not see me as I slunk past him with guilty face, and swiftly sped round the nearest corner to eat the stolen morsel.

What is the use of a single baked potato? Presently I returned to the same place with the intention of taking another. But they were all gone. I went on looking for another provision shop. I came to a place where hot smoking sausages were bubbling in a pan over a charcoal fire. The shop stood at a corner. There was only a girl minding it. I deliberately walked in, took a sausage from the pan, hot as it was, and stepped out again before her astonishment even prompted her to cry out.

The time seemed intolerably long. All these scenes passed before me, not as the quick and steady flight of the rapidly falling moments, but as if the agony and the shame were deliberately lengthened out.

Then came a third time when I stole, maddened by the dream of hunger. This time I was detected, pursued, and apprehended. The misery and shame of the hour when I stood before the magistrate, in that horrible vision of a possible future, I cannot even yet forget. With this a constant sense of unsatisfied and craving hunger; a feeling as if hunger was the greatest evil in the whole world; a longing to get rid of it. Last scene of all, I was lying dead, starved to death with hunger and cold, in a miserable, bare, and naked garret.

By what black art did the old man delude my senses? It was a lie, and he knew it. I should have got some honest work, if only to wheel bricks or carry loads.

"There is your future, young man"—there came up from the distance the voice of the tempter—"a gloomy prospect: a miserable life: a wretched ending. Now look at the other side."

The scene changed. I saw myself, but in another guise. My hunger had vanished; I felt it no more.

This time I was happy, light-hearted, and cheerful. I remembered scenes of misery through which I had just passed, and the recollection added more sweetness to my present enjoyment. It seemed as if I should never be hungry any more, and never feel the want of food. I was like a Greek god in my exemption from the common weakness of humanity. I was rich, too, and knew that I had the command, somehow, of all that money could buy.

I was sitting in a garden, and around me were troops of girls. I heard the rustle of their dresses, caught the laughter from their lips, watched the lustre of their eyes, saw the moonlight dance among their waving locks, as they ran and played among the trees and flowers. One of them sat by me and sang to a guitar—

Life is made for love. Ah! why
Should its sweetness e'er be marred?
List! the echoes will not die,
Still the sweet word "love" to guard.

Nought but love. Oh! happy youth,
Free from need of baser thought,
Stay with us, and learn this truth,
Set with song, with music wrought.

Thine is love, an endless feast;
Beauty—sweeter far than wine;
Joy, from lower cares released—
Never star rose bright as thine.

I knew, somehow or other, that this was allegorical, and, as if I expressed my thought, the scene changed, and I was in real life.

Chambers in London, such as I had read of, overlooking St. James's Park. I sat in them in the midst of books and pictures. I had no business to call me away from my indolent ease; I had no anxiety about the future. I got up and strolled about the streets, looking at the shops. If I fancied a thing I bought it. I went to picture galleries and saw the latest works of art; I went to the theatre and saw the performance from a comfortable box; I went riding in the park.

Then my fancy returned to my first love, and I saw myself walking in a country lane with Juliet. She was sweeter to look upon than ever, and more delightful in her frank and innocent love for me. We rambled along under the hedges while I gathered flowers for her, and talked of the happy, happy days when we should be one, soon now to arrive, and of the sweet, loving life which should be ours far away from the troubles of the world.

Dreams, idle dreams; but sweet to me, after the agony of the last, as a draught of water to a parched traveller on Sahara.

The pictures changed as fast as my fancy wandered from one thing to another. In all I was the same—free from the downward and earthly pressure of want and hunger, relieved from anxiety, with plenty of money, and full of all sweet and innocent fancies.

Lies again. But by what power could this necromancer so cheat and gull my brain?

"Very different scenes these, my dear young friend," he said in a winning voice, "are they not? Now," he went on, and his voice was quite close to me, "you have had your five minutes."

The cloud passed from my eyes. I was sitting again in the octagonal room, the old man before me, watch in hand, as if he was counting the seconds.

"Five minutes and a quarter," he growled. "Now choose."

"I have chosen," I replied. "I accept your offer."

The influence of the things I had seen was too strong upon me. I could neither reason nor reflect.

"I accept your offer."

"Why, that's brave," he said, with a gigantic sigh of relief. "That's what I expected of you. Boule-de-neige—Boule-de-neige!"

He clapped his hands.

Instantly the horrible old negro appeared behind his master's chair, as if he had sprung up from the ground. I believe he had. He looked more like a devil than ever, grinning from ear to ear, and his two eyes glowing in the candlelight like two great coals. The light fell, too, upon the seams and wrinkles of his face, bringing them out like the hills and valleys in a raised map. Strange as it all was to me, this ancient servitor produced the strangest effect upon me of anything.

"Boule-de-neige is witness for us," said the old gentleman. "Boule-de-neige, this young gentleman, Mr. Luke Lucraft, is about to sign a little deed, to which, as a matter of form, we require your signature too as witness."

"Cluck!" said the negro. "Dis young gegleman berry lucky—him berry lucky. What time massa take him dinner?"

"When do you think you shall be fairly hungry again?" he asked me. "Now, no boastings—no false pretence and pride—because it will be the worse for you. Answer truthfully. It is now six."

"I should say that at nine I should be able to take some supper, and at ten I shall certainly be hungry again. As an ordinary rule I should be ready a great deal earlier, but I have taken such an immense dinner."

"Good." He turned to Boule-de-neige. "You see the young man is modest and promises fairly. I shall have supper—a plentiful supper—at ten punctually. Mr. Lucraft will now sign."

I advanced to the table and took up the pen, but there was no ink.

"Cluck!" said the infernal negro, with another grin—"cluck! Massa wait lilly bit."

He took my left hand in his soft and cold paw. I felt a sharp prick at my wrist.

"You will dip the pen," said the old gentleman, "in the blood. It is a mere form."

"Cluck!" said Boule-de-neige.

"A mere form because we have no ink handy."

"Cluck-cluck!"

I signed my name as desired, and, following the directions of the old gentleman, placed my finger on the red wafer at the margin, saying, "I declare this my act and deed."

Then I gave the pen to Boule-de-neige. He signed after me, in a firm flowing hand, "Boule-de-neige." As I looked, the letters seemed somehow to shape themselves into "Beelzebub." I looked at him with a kind of terror. The creature grinned in my face as if he divined my thought, and gave utterance to one of his hideous "clucks."

Then I began to feel the same faintness which I had at first experienced. It mounted upwards from my feet slowly, so that I heard the old gentleman's voice, though I saw nothing. It grew gradually fainter.

"Supper at ten, Boule-de-neige," he was saying; "I feel getting hungry already. What shall I do with myself till ten o'clock? I am certainly getting hungry. I think I can have it served at half-past nine. Oh, blessed day! Oh, thankful blessed day! Boule-de-neige, it must be supper for three—for four—for five. I shall have champagne—the Perrier Jouet—the curacoa punch afterwards. Curacoa punch—I haven't tasted it for three months and more. Oh, what a blessed—blessed—blessed——"

I heard no more because my senses failed me altogether, and his voice died away in my ears.

When I came to myself I was leaning against the post in Bucklersbury, where I had met the old man.

A whiff of stale cooked meat from the cook-shop, which caught me as I opened my eyes, produced a singular feeling of disgust. "Pah," I muttered, "roast mutton!" and moved from the spot. My hunger was gone, that was quite certain. I felt a quietness about those regions, wherever they may be, which belong to appetite. I was almost dreamy in the repose which followed a morning so stormy. I walked

quietly away homewards in a kind of daze, trying to make out something of what had happened. The first thing I found I could not remember was the name of the old gentleman. When that came back to me and under what circumstances I will tell you as we get along. Bit by bit I recalled the whole events of the afternoon, one after the other. I saw the old man, with his purple face and bloodshot eyes and white hair; I saw the wrinkled and seamed old negro; I saw the octagonal room without doors or windows; the splendid dinner; the host watching my every gesture; I remembered everything except the name of the man to whom I had sold—my appetite.

It was so strange that I laughed when I thought of it. I must have been drunk: he gave me a good dinner and I took too much wine; but, then, how was it that I remembered clearly every, even the smallest, detail?

On the bed in the one room which constituted my lodging I found a letter. It was from a firm of lawyers, dated that evening at half-past six—only half an hour after I signed the paper—stating that they were empowered by a client, whose name was not mentioned, to give me the sum of £30 monthly, to begin from that day, and to be paid to me personally. How did they get their instructions then? And it was all true!

I was too tired with the day's adventures to think any more; and, though it was only nine o'clock, I went to bed and fell fast asleep. In an hour I awoke again, with a choking sensation, as if I was eating too much. I knew instantly what was going on, and by a kind of prophetic insight. The old man was taking his supper, and taking more than was good—for me. I sprang from the bed, gasping for breath. Presently, as I gathered, he began to drink too much as well. My brain went round and round. I laughed, sang, and danced; and soon after, with a heavy fall, I rolled senseless on the carpet, and remembered nothing more.

It was early in the morning when I awoke, still lying on the floor. I had a splitting headache. I had fallen against

some corner of the furniture and blackened one eye. I had broken two chairs somehow or other. I was cold, ill, and shaken. I got into bed, and tried to remember what had happened. Clearly I must have made a drunken beast of myself over the dinner, and reeled home with my head full of fancies and dreams; perhaps the dinner itself was a dream and a hallucination too; if so the pangs of hunger would soon recommence. But they did not. Then I fell asleep, and did not awake again till the clock struck twelve. How ill and wretched I felt as I dressed! My hand shook, my eyes were red, my face swollen. Surely I must have been intoxicated. I had been, up to that day at least, a temperate man, partly, no doubt, from the very wholesome reason which keeps so many of us sober—the necessity of poverty; but of course I had not arrived at four and twenty years and seen so much of the world without recognising the signs of too much drink. I had them, every one; and, as most men know too well, they are all summed up in the simple expression, “hot coppers.” Alas! I was destined to become only too familiar with the accursed symptoms. Involuntarily, when I had dressed myself, I put my hands in my pockets, those pockets so often empty; there was money, gold—sovereigns—my pocket was full of them. I counted them in a stupor. Forty-nine, and one rolled into the corner—fifty; it was part of the sum for which I had sold my appetite; and on the table lay the letter from Messrs. Crackett and Charges, inviting me to draw thirty pounds a month.

Then it was all true!

I sat down, and, with my throbbing temples and feverish pulse, tried to make it out. Everything became plain except the name of the purchaser—Mr.—Mr.— I remembered *Boule-de-neige*, the house, the room, and the dinner, but not the name of that arch-deceiver, the whole of whose villainy I was far from realising yet; and until it was told me later on I never did remember the name.

It was strange. Men are said to have sold their souls to the devil for money, bartering away an eternity of happiness for a few years of pleasure; but as for me, I had exchanged,

as it seemed at first sight, nothing but the inconvenience of a healthy appetite with nothing to eat for the means of living comfortably without it. There could be no sin in such a transaction; it was on a different level altogether from the bargain made by Faust. And there were the broad, the benevolent facts, so to speak—my pocket full of sovereigns; and the letter instructing me to call at an office for thirty pounds monthly.

Benevolent facts I thought them. You shall see. You think, as I thought, that no sin could be laid to my door for the transaction. You shall judge. You think, as I thought, that no harm could follow so simple a piece of business. You shall read. On my way out I met the landlady, who gave me notice to quit at the end of the week.

"I thought you were a quiet and a sober young man," she said. "Ah, never will I trust to good looks again. Me and the lodgers kept awake till two in the morning with your singing and dancing, let alone banging the floor with the chairs. Not another hour after your week's up, if you was to pray on your knees, shall you stay. And next door threatening the constables; and me a quiet woman for twenty years."

My heart sank again. But, after all, perhaps it was I myself, not the good old gentleman, my kind patron and benefactor, at all, who was the cause of this disturbance. It was undoubtedly true that I had taken a great quantity of wine with my splendid dinner. I begged her pardon humbly, and passed out.

It was now nearly one o'clock, but I felt no desire for breakfast. That was an experience quite novel to me. Still, I went to a coffee-house, according to habit, and ordered some tea and a rasher. When they came I discovered, with a horrid foreboding of worse misfortune behind, that my taste was gone. Except that one thing was solid and the other liquid, I distinguished nothing. Nor did my sense of smell assist me: as I found later, my nose was affected agreeably or disagreeably, but it lost all its discriminating and critical powers. Gunpowder, sulphuretted hydrogen gas, and tobacco

offended my nose. So did certain smells belonging to cookery. On the other hand, certain flowers, tea, and claret pleased me, but I was unable to distinguish between them. Not only could I not taste them, but I had no gratification in eating them. I ate and drank mechanically, because I knew that the body must be kept going on something.

All this knowledge, however, and more, came by degrees. After making a forced breakfast I bent my steps to the lawyers', who had an office in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

The letter was received by a conceited young clerk in shiny black habiliments, a turned-up nose, and a self-satisfied manner.

"Ha!" he said, "I thought you would soon come round to us after the letter. Sign that. You haven't been long. None of them are."

It was a receipt; and I was on the point of asking if it was to be signed in blood, when he settled the question by giving me the ink.

"There, Luke Lucraft, across the eightpenny stamp. I'm not allowed to answer any questions you may put, Mr. Lucraft, nor to ask you any; so take your money, and good morning to you. I suppose, like the rest of them, you don't know the name of your benefactor, and would like to—yes; but you needn't ask *me*; and I've orders not to admit you to see either Mr. Charges or Mr. Crackett. They'd trouble enough with the last but one. He broke into their office once, drunk, and laid about him with the ruler."

I burst into a cold dew of terror.

"However, Mr. Lucraft, I hope you will be more fortunate than your predecessors."

"Where are they? Who are they?"

"I do not know where they are, not for a certainty," he replied with a grin. "But we may guess. Dead and buried they are, all of them. Gone to kingdom come; all died of the same thing, too—D. T. Delicious Trimmings killed them. Poor old gentleman! He's too good for this world, as everybody knows, and the more he's taken in the more he's deceived. Anyhow, he's very unlucky in his pensioners.

He did say when the last went off that he would have no more; he wept over it, and declared that his bounty was always abused: but there never was such a benevolent old chap. I only wish he'd take a fancy to me."

"What did you say is his name, by the way?"

The clerk looked at me with a cunning wink.

"If you don't know, I am sure I do not," he said. "Here is the cheque, Mr. Lucraft, and I hope you will continue to come here and draw it a good deal longer than the other chaps. But there's a blight on all the pensioners. Lord, what a healthy chap Tom Kirby—he was a Monmouth man—looked when he first came for his cheques! As strong as a bull and as fresh as a lark."

"A good appetite had he?"

"No; couldn't eat anything after a bit; said he fancied nothing. Lost his taste entirely. He pined away and died in a galloping consumption before the third month was due. Nobody ever saw him drinking, but he was drunk every night, regular, like the rest. Perhaps it's only coincidence. Better luck to *you*, Mr. Lucraft."

This conversation did not reassure me, and I determined to go over to Bucklersbury at once and see my patron. I found the post against which I was leaning when he accosted me; there was no doubt about that, for the hares and cauliflowers were still in the shop-window, only they looked disgusting to me this morning. I found the street into which he had led me, and then—then—it was the most extraordinary thing, I could not find the door by which we entered. Not only was there no door, but there seemed no place where such a door as I remembered could exist in this little narrow winding street. I went up and down twice. I looked at all the windows. I asked a policeman if he had ever seen an old gentleman about the street such as I described, or such a negro as *Boule-de-neige*; but he could give no information. Only as I prowled slowly along the pavement I heard distinctly—it gave me a nervous shock that I could not account for—the infernal "Cluck-cluck!" of the negro with the cold soft hands, the wrinkled skin, and the fiery red eyes. He

was chuckling at me from some hiding-place of his own, where he was safe. He had done me no harm that I knew of, but I hated him at that moment.

I was by this time not at all elated at my good fortune. I even craved to have back again what I had sold. I felt heavy at heart, and had a presentiment of fresh trouble before me. I thought of the fate of those unknown and unfortunate predecessors, all dead in consequence of drink, evil courses, and D.T. Heavens! was I too to die miserably with delirium tremens, after I had sold my taste, and could only tell brandy from water, like the cask which might hold either, by the smell?

At half-past one—the luncheon time for all who have appetites—the sense of being gorged came upon me again, but this time without the giddiness. I went to a tavern in the Strand and fell sound asleep. When I awoke at six the oppression had passed away. And now I began to realise something of the consequences of my act. I say something, because worse, far worse, remained behind. I was doomed, I saw clearly, to be the victim of the old man's gluttony. He would eat and I should suffer. Already, as I guessed from the clerk's statements, he had killed four strong men before me. I was to be the fifth. I went again to Bucklersbury, and sought in every house for something that might give me a clue. I loitered in the quiet city streets in the hope of finding my tormentor, and forcing him to give me back my bond. There was no clue, and I did not meet him. But I felt him. He began dinner, as nearly as I could feel, about seven o'clock; he took his meal with deliberation, judging from the gradual nature of my sensations; but he took an amazing quantity, and by eight o'clock the weight upon me was so great that I could scarcely breathe. How I cursed my folly! How I impotently writhed under the burden I had wantonly laid upon myself! And then he began to drink. The fiend, the scoundrel! I felt the fumes mount to my head; there was no exhilaration, no forgetfulness of misery; none of the pleasant gradations of excitement, hope, and confidence, through which men are accus-

tomed to pass before arriving at the final stage, the complete oblivion, of intoxication. I felt myself getting gradually but hopelessly drunk. I struggled against the feeling, but in vain; the houses went round and round with me: my speech, when I tried to speak, became thick; the flags of the pavement flew up and struck me violently on the forehead, and I became unconscious of what happened afterwards.

CHAPTER III.

IN the morning I found myself lying on a stone bench in a small whitewashed room. My brows were throbbing and my throat was parched, and in my brain was ringing, I do not know why, the infernal "Cluck-cluck!" of the negro with derisive iteration. I had not long to meditate; the door opened, and a constable appeared.

"Now then," he said roughly, "if you can stand upright by this time, come along."

It was clear enough to me now what had happened: I was in custody, in a police-cell, and I was going before the magistrate.

I dream of that ignominy still, though forty years have passed since I was placed in the dock and asked what I had to say for myself. "Drunk and disorderly."

I was charged by the constable—there were no police in 1823—with being drunk and disorderly. Twenty other poor wretches were waiting their trial for the same offence; one or two for graver charges. My case came first, and had the honour of being reported in the papers. Here is the extract cut out of the *Morning Chronicle*:—

"A young man, who gave his name as Henry Luke, and said he was an actor by profession, was charged with being drunk and disorderly in the streets. The constable found him at ten o'clock lying on the pavement of Bucklersbury, too drunk even to speak, and quite unable therefore to give any account of himself. A cheque, signed by the well-known firm of Crackett & Charges, for £30 was found on his

person. The magistrate remarked that this was a suspicious circumstance, and decided to remand the case till these gentlemen could be communicated with. One of the partners appeared at twelve, and deposed that the prisoner's real name was Luke Lucraft, that he had been an actor, and that the cheque had been given him by the firm, acting for a client who wished to be anonymous, but whose motive was pure benevolence.

"The magistrate, on hearing the facts of the case, addressed the prisoner with a suitable admonition. He bade him remember that such an abuse of a good man's charity, as he had been guilty of, was the worst form of ingratitude. It appeared that on the very day of receiving a gift, which was evidently intended to advance him in life, or to find him the means of procuring suitable employment, the prisoner deliberately made himself so hopelessly drunk that he could neither speak nor stand—where, it did not appear. The magistrate could not but feel that this conduct showed the gravest want of moral principle, and he strongly advised Mr. Crackett to cancel the cheque till further orders. As, however, it was a first offence, and in consideration of the prisoner's youth, the fine inflicted would be a small one of ten shillings, with costs."

That was the newspaper account of the affair. On his way out of the court, Mr. Crackett stopped me.

"Young man," he said, shaking his head, "this is very dreadful. I warned my benevolent client against this act of generosity. You are the fifth young man whom he has assisted in this magnificent manner. The former, all four, took to drink, and died in a disgraceful manner. Take warning, and stop while it is yet time."

I got away as fast as I could, and crept back to my lodging after the necessary miserable breakfast.

I am not ashamed to say that I sat down and cried. The tears *would* crowd into my eyes. It was too dreadful. Here I was only twenty-four years of age, with my life before me, doomed, through my own folly, to a miserable ending and a disgraceful reputation. What good would come of having money under these dreadful conditions?

Money, indeed! What had become of the fifty pounds given me only two days before? Gone. All gone but one single sovereign which served to pay my fine. Some one had robbed me. Perhaps the constables. Perhaps a street thief. It was gone. The sorry reward of my consent to the unholy bargain was clean swept away, and only the consequences of the contract remained.

In the afternoon, as I hastened home along the darkening streets, hoping to reach my lodging before the daily gorge began, a curious thing happened to me. On the other side of the street, in a dark corner, standing upright, and pointing to me with a finger of derision, I saw *Boule-de-neige*, the negro servant. I rushed at him, blind with rage. When I got to the spot I found nobody there. Was it a trick of a disordered brain? I had seen him, quite plainly grinning at me with his wrinkled features. As I turned from the place I heard his familiar "Cluck-cluck."

Twice more on the way this strange phantom appeared to me; each time accompanied by the "cluck" of his voice. It was a phantom with which I was to become familiar indeed, before I had finished with *Boule-de-neige* and his master.

It was clear that the demon to whom I had sold myself was incapable of the slightest consideration towards me. He would eat and drink as much as he felt disposed to do, careless of any consequences that might befall me. It was equally evident that he intended to make the most of his bargain, to eat enormously every day, and to drink himself drunk every night. And I was powerless. Meantime it was becoming evident that the consequences to me would be as serious as if I were myself guilty of these excesses. One drop of comfort alone remained: my appetite would fail, and my tormentor would be punished where he would feel it most. I lay down and waited till luncheon time; no sense of repletion came over me; it was certain, therefore, that he was already suffering a vicarious punishment, so to speak, for yesterday's debauch.

The next day, however, I really did meet my negro.

It was about five in the afternoon—the time when I was

tolerably safe, because my owner, who took a plentiful luncheon at one, did not begin his nightly orgy much before seven. I was loitering about Bucklersbury, my favourite place of resort, in the hope of meeting the old man, when my arm was touched as I turned round. It *was* the negro. "Massa Lucraft," he said, "you come along o' me. Massa him berry glad to see you."

I declare that although the moment before I had been picturing such an encounter, although I had imagined myself with my fingers at his throat, dragging him off, and forcing him to tell me who and what he was, I felt myself unable to speak.

"Come along o' me, Massa Lucraft," he said; "this way—way you know berry well. Ho, ho!—Cluck."

He stopped before the door I remembered, but had never been able to find, opened it with a little key, and led the way to the octagonal room.

There was no one in it, but the table was already laid for dinner.

"Massa come bymeby. You wait, young gegleman."

Then he disappeared somehow.

As before, I could see no door. As before, the first sensation which came over me was of giddiness, from which I recovered immediately. I walked round and round the room, looking at the heavy furniture, the pictures, which were all of fruit and game, and the silver plate. Everything showed the presence of great wealth, and, I supposed, though I knew nothing about it, great taste. I was kept waiting for nearly two hours. That I did not mind, because every moment brought me, I thought, nearer to the hour of my deliverance. I was certain that I had only to put the case to Mr. Grumbelow—I remembered his name the moment I was back in that room—to appeal to his generosity, his honour, his pity, in order to obtain my release. Mr. Grumbelow—Ebenezer Grumbelow—he was the charitable client of Messrs. Crackett and Charges, was he? Why, I might show him up to popular derision and hatred. I might tell the world who and what this great benefactor of young men really was.

Suddenly, as the clock struck seven, he stood upon the

carpet before me, while Boule-de-neige stood at the table with a soup tureen in his hand. I declare that I did not see at any time any one enter the room or go out of it. They appeared to be suddenly in it.

I do hope that the appearance of small details like the above, at first incredible, will not be taken as proof of want of veracity on my own part. I wish that I could tell the tale without these particulars, but I cannot. I must relate the whole or none.

"You here?" said Mr. Grumbelow, looking at me with an air of contempt. He seated himself at the table and unfolded his napkin. "Soup, Boule-de-neige."

"Massa hungry? Dat young debbel there he look berry pale already."

"Pretty well, Boule-de-neige, considering. You, sir, come here, and let me look at you." I obeyed. "Hold out your hand. It shakes. Let me look at your eyes. They are yellow. Do you know that your appetite seems to me to be failing already—already—and it is only the fourth day."

"It is not my fault," I said.

"Nonsense. Don't talk to me, sir, because I will have none of your insolence. I say that you do not walk enough. I order you to walk twelve miles a day—even twenty, after a heavy night—do you hear?"

"It is not in the contract," I replied doggedly.

"It *is* in the contract. You are to use every means in your power to keep your faculties in vigour. What means have you used?"

He banged the spoon on the table and glanced at me so fiercely that I had nothing to say.

"Massa, soup get cold," said Boule-de-neige.

He gobbled it up, every now and then looking up at me with an angry grunt.

"Now then, you and your contract. This is pretty ingratitude, this is. Here's a fellow, Boule-de-neige, I pick up out of the gutter, starving; whom I keep expensively; whom I endow with an income; whom I deprive of the temptation to gluttony."

"Nebber see such a debbel in all my days," said the negro; "nebber hear such a ting told nowhere."

"No nor ever will. Listen to me, sir. You will walk ten, twelve, or twenty miles a day, according to the dinner I have had. And, mark you, it will be the worse for you if you do not. Remember, if I cannot eat I can drink."

There was a fiendish glare in his blood-stained eyes as he spoke, and I trembled. My spirit was so completely gone that I had not even the pluck to appeal to his pity. Perhaps a secret consciousness of the uselessness of such an appeal deterred me.

"You will now," he said, "watch me making as large a dinner as your miserably languid appetite will allow."

"I have been drunk for four nights," I pleaded.

"Then you have no business to get drunk so easily. Your head is contemptibly weak—what did I take yesterday, *Boule-de-neige*."

"Big bottle champagne, big bottle port, eight goes whisky grog."

"I did—and that was all. Why your predecessor stood double the quantity."

"Beg pardon, massa. Last young gegleman poor trash—last but two—him mighty strong head—head like bull—nebber get drunk."

"Ah, we wasted him, *Boule-de-neige*; we fooled him away in one imprudent evening. I told you at the time that *noyeau* punch is a very dangerous thing."

"Ho, ho!" the diabolical negro laughed till his teeth showed like the grinning jaws of a death's head. "Ho, ho! him so blind drunk he tumble out of window—break him neck. Ho, ho!"

This was a pleasant conversation for me to hear.

Then Mr. Grumbelow resumed his dinner. He ate a good deal in spite of his grumbling, and then he began to drink port. I observed that the wine had a peculiar effect upon him. It made him redder in the face, but not thicker in speech. He drank two bottles, talking at me all the time. I began to get drunk, he only got the more merrily fiendish.

"This is really delightful," he said, as I reeled and caught at a chair for support. "I wonder I never thought of this before. It is quite a new pleasure to watch the effects of my own drink on another man's brain. I shall write a book about you. I shall call it 'The Young Christian deterred, or Leaves from Luke Lucraft's Wicked Life.' Ho, ha! ha, ho! I saw the account in the *Morning Post*. Heigh, heigh!"—he nearly choked as he recalled the circumstance. "The magistrate admonishing the wicked drunkard. Ho, ho! It is like a farce. Stand up, sir, stand up. He can't stand up. Can you sing? Can you dance? He could not even dance a hornpipe. Do you feel a little thickness in your speech? Would you be able to explain to the worthy magistrate the circumstances, quite beyond your own control, which brought you into that painful position in which you stood? It is the best situation that ever was put upon any stage. There's nothing like it in fiction. Nothing. Walter Scott never invented anything half so rich. Ho, ho, ho! he is really getting drunk already. What a poor creature it is!"

He paused for a moment and then went on.

"Boule-de-neige, coffee; brandy in it—plenty of brandy, and a glass of curacao afterwards. A large glass, sir! I'll have a night of it. Your health, Luke Lucraft, in this coffee; and you had better take care of it, or I'll pack you off with noyeau punch. Pleasant times you are having, eh? Might have been worse, you know. You might have been starving. What? Don't fall against the table in that way. Take care of the furniture. It cost a great deal more money than you are worth. So, sit down on the floor while I tell you about your predecessors, dead and gone, poor fellows.

"Let me see. The first was William Saunders, a poor devil of a clerk of mine. He disgraced himself in chapel one week-day prayer-meeting, the very evening of his signature; then he ran away, but Boule-de-neige found him out, and brought him back. He took to praying and crying. One day he died in St. Bartholomew's Hospital of delirium tremens. He lasted about six months.

"The next was Hans Hansen, a Dane. He only lasted

about three weeks, because he became melancholy directly he found he could no longer taste brandy. I was disappointed with Hansen, and when he jumped off London Bridge into the Thames one night, his appetite having quite gone, I was really very sorry on account of the temporary inconvenience it put me to; and I determined to be very careful in his successor. I remember I had a good deal of trouble to find one.

"However, at last I got a third man, a stout Cumberland chap, son of a statesman. You poor, puny little strolling actor, I suppose that you will hardly believe that I once took four and twenty tumblers of Scotch whisky and water without affecting that brave fellow's appetite one bit. He used to take it out in swearing; and really he was almost too often in trouble with the magistrates. He never clearly understood that his safety lay in being home early in the evening. Once he nearly killed Mr. Crackett in his own office. Poor Crackett! that eminent Christian lawyer; I should never have forgiven myself had anything happened to the worthy Crackett. Well! he went too; at least, after a good tough twelvemonth. It was my own fault, and I ought not to grumble. That noyeau punch was strong enough to kill the devil."

"Cluck," said Boule-de-neige.

"Then we came to Tom Kirby. None of them looked so well or promised so much; none broke down so easily. A whining fellow too; a crying, sobbing, appealing rogue, who wanted to get off his bargain. However, *de mortuis*—Your health, Luke Lucraft. Hallo! hold up.

"I tell you what I mean to do after you are worked off, Luke Lucraft. I mean to have a brace of fellows. I shall go down to the London docks, or else to the railway stations, and find a couple of trusty young porters. They are the sort of men to have. Fine, strong, well-set-up rascals. Men with muscles like rigging ropes—don't clutch at the chairs, Lucraft—if you can't sit up you may lie down—I shall make them come here—give them a blow-out of steak—I wasted a splendid dinner on you—and then I shall make them sign.

"The great thing, then, will be to have the appetites of

two men; twice as much to eat and twice as much to drink. I never thought of that before.

"And then to bring both the rogues up here of an evening and make them wait and see me eat; watch them gradually lolling and reeling about till they tumble over each other; go secretly and hear them curse me—me, their benefactor—Ho! ho! I think I shall not be long over you, Luke Lucraft. Hallo; keep your drunken legs away from the table. Boulevard-neige, roll this intoxicated log into the street."

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN I came to my senses it was of course the next morning, and I was lying in my own bedroom, whither I had been carried by two strange men, the landlady afterwards told me, who said they were paid for the job. I had a splitting headache. I was sick and giddy; my limbs trembled beneath me when I tried to stand; my hands shook. I looked at myself in the glass. Swollen features and bloodshot eyes greeted me.

Less than a week had wrought this ruin.

The ordinary drunkard refreshes himself in the morning with tea. Nothing refreshed me, because I could taste nothing, and because my sufferings sprang from a different source, though they were the same in kind. I had to bear them as best I might.

I remembered the command which Mr.—Mr.—strange, I had forgotten his name again—gave me, to walk twenty miles after a "heavy night." I started to obey him.

Outside London, beyond Islington, where there are now rows of houses, but were then fields, I saw a little modest cottage, standing alone in its garden. It was a cottage with four rooms only, covered over with creepers. On the board, standing at the gate, was an announcement that it was to let. A thought struck me: Here could be seclusion, at any rate. Here I could shut myself up every night, and await in comparative safety the dreadful punishment — fast becoming heavier than I could bear — which my tormenter inflicted

upon me. Why should I not take the cottage, pay the rent in advance every month—for how many months should I have to pay it?—and so wait in patience and resignation the approach of my inevitable fate?

I made inquiries at once, and secured the place at a merely nominal rent. Then I moved in a little furniture, bought secondhand in Islington High Street, and became the occupant, a lonely hermit, of the house. There were no houses within hearing, in case I should storm and rage in my drunken madness at night. The cottage stood removed from the road, and no callers were likely to trouble me. Within those walls I should be secure from some dangers at least. Here, night after night, I could await the attacks of surfeit and intoxication which regularly came; for my master knew no pity.

On the first evening I sat down at half-past six to prepare for what was coming. The day was drawing in, and a cold twilight—the month was March—covered the trees and shrubs in my little garden, as I opened the door and looked out.

Before me stood the negro.

My spirit was quite broken, and I could only groan.

“Do you want me to go with you again?” I asked, thinking of the last entertainment at which I provided amusement for his master.

“Massa say him berry glad you come hyar. You walk the twenty mile ebbery day, else massa know the reason why. How you feel, Massa Lucraft? Heigh! heigh! cluck. Dat most fortunate day for you when you sign dat little paper.”

He delivered his message and disappeared in the darkness. I heard his footsteps crunching the gravel in the road, and I longed, only now I had no courage or spirit left, to seize him and tear him limb from limb.

Then I shut myself in, lit one candle, and sat over the fire. I thought of the scenes by which my extravagant fancy had been excited; the garden full of lively girls—what were girls to me now? the country walks I was to have with Juliet—where was my passion for Juliet now? The ease and happiness, the lightness and innocence, of the life before me, drawn by an arch-deceiver, compared with my present, my actual misery,

sitting alone, cut off from mankind, the slave and victim of a secret profligate and glutton, doomed to die slowly, unless it should please the murderer to kill me off quickly.

And then, because the first symptoms of the attack were coming on, I went to bed and stayed there.

So began my new life. A wretched life it was. There was no occupation possible for me—no amusement. I walked every day, in fair weather or foul, a measured twenty miles.

This in some degree restored vitality to my system. I never read; I took no interest in any politics. I sat by myself, and brooded.

As for my meals, I bought them ready prepared. They consisted almost wholly of bread and cold mutton. You may judge of the absolutely tasteless condition to which I was reduced, when I write calmly and truthfully that cold boiled mutton was as agreeable to me as any other form of food. I found, after repeated trials, that mutton forms the best fuel—it is better than either beef or pork—and keeps the human engine at work for the longest time. So I had mutton. As I discovered also that bulk was necessary, and that only a certain amount of animal food was wanted, I used to have cold potatoes always ready. I stoked twice a day, at eleven in the morning and about five in the afternoon. Thus fortified, I got through the miserable hours as best I could.

I look back on that period as one of unmitigated misery and despair. I was daily growing more bloated, fatter, and flabbier in the cheeks. My hands trembled in the morning. I seemed losing the power of connected thought. My very lips were thickening.

I hope I am making it clear what was the effect of my bargain on myself—I mean without reference to the sufferings inflicted on me by my tyrant. People, however, never can know, unless they happen to be like myself, which is unlikely, how great a part eating and drinking take in the conduct of life. Between the rest of the world and me there was a great gulf fixed. They could enjoy, I could not; they could celebrate every joyful event with something additional to eat; they could make a little festival of every day; they

could give to happiness an outward and tangible form. Alas, not only was I debarred from this, but I was cut off even from joy itself; for, if you look at it steadily, you will find that most of human joy or suffering is connected with the senses. I had bartered away a good half of mine, and the rest seemed in mourning for the loss of their fellows. As for my pale and colourless life, it was as monotonous as the clock. If I neglected to stoke, the usual feebleness would follow. There was no gracious looking forward to a pleasant dinner; no trembling anticipations in hope and fear of what might be preparing; no cheerful contemplation of the joint while the carver sharpens his knife; no discussions of flavour and richness; no modestly hazarded conclusions as to more currants; no rolling of the wine-glass in the fingers to the light, and smacking of lips over the first sip—all these things were lost to me. Reader, if haply this memoir ever sees a posthumous light, think what would happen to yourself if eating and drinking, those perennial joys of humanity, which last from the infantine pap to the senile Revalenta Arabica, were taken away.

All things tasted alike, as I have said, and cold mutton formed my staple dish. As I could only distinguish between beer, wine, coffee, and tea by the look, I drank water. If I ventured, which was seldom, to take my dinner at a cookshop, I would choose my *piece de résistance* by the look, by some fancied grace in the shape, but not by taste or smell. The brown of roast beef might attract me one day and repel me the next. I was pleased with the comeliness of a game-pie, or tickled by some inexplicable external charm of a beef-steak-pudding. But three quarters of my life were gone, and with them all my happiness.

If you have no appetite for eating, you can enjoy nothing in the whole world. That is an axiom. I could not taste, therefore my eye ceased to feel delight in pleasant sights, and my ear in pleasant sounds. It was not with me as in the case of a blind man, that an abnormal development of some other sense ensued; quite the contrary. In selling one, I seem to have sold them all. For; as I discovered, man is one and inseparable; you cannot split him up; and when my

arch-deceiver bought my appetite, he bought me out and out. A wine merchant might as well pretend to sell the bouquet of claret and preserve the body ; or a painter the colour of his picture and preserve the drawing ; or a sculptor the grace of his group and keep the marble.

As regards other losses, I found I had lost the perception of beauty in form or colour. Why this was so I cannot explain. I was no longer, I suppose, in harmony with other men on any single point. Pretty women passed me unheeded ; pictures had no charm for me ; music was only irritating to my nerves.

Then I found that I had lost the power of sympathy. I had formerly been a soft-hearted man. I remarked now that the sight of suffering found me entirely callous. There was a poor family living about half a mile from me, whose acquaintance I made through buying some of my supplies of them. They were in distress for rent ; they applied to me . . . there, I cannot bear to think of it. I had the money and I refused them. They were sold up, and I sat at my door and watched them on their way to London—the mother, the two girls, the little boy, hand in hand, homeless and penniless—without a pang and without a single prompting of the heart to help them. God knows what became of them. May He forgive me for the hard-hearted cruelty with which I regarded their fate.

Had I, then, sold everything to this man ?

I had been pretty religious in a way—a young man's way. Now I had lost all religious feeling whatever. I had once ambition and hopes, these were gone ; I had once the capacity of love, that was gone ; I had once a generous heart, that was gone ; I once loved things worth loving, I felt no emotion now for anything. I was a machine which could feel. I was a man with the humanity taken out of him.

This time lasted for about four months. On the first of each month I went to receive my pay—the wages of sin—from the clerk, who surveyed me critically, but said nothing till the morning of the fourth month. Then, while he handed me my money, he whispered confidentially across the table—

"Look here, old fellow, you know ; you're going it worse than poor Tom Kirby. Why don't you stop it? What is the good of a feller's drinking himself to death? The old gentleman was here yesterday, asking me how you looked, and if you continued steady. Pull up, old man, and knock it off."

I took the money in my trembling hands and slunk away abashed. When I got home again, I am not ashamed to say that I cried like a child.

Delirium tremens! That would begin soon, and then the end would not be far off. It was too awful. Think of my position. I was but four-and-twenty. Not only was I deprived of the pleasure—mind you, a very real pleasure—of eating and drinking ; I was the most temperate man in the world, though that was no great credit to myself, considering ; and yet I bore in my face and my appearance, and felt in my very brain, all the marks and signs of confirmed drunkenness and the hopelessness of it. That hardened old voluptuary, that demon of gluttony, that secret murderer, would have no pity. He must have felt by the falling-off of the splendid appetite which he was doing his utmost to ruin, that things were getting worse, and he was resolved—I had suspected this for some time—to kill me off by drinking me to death.

I believe I should have been dead in another week, but for a blessed respite, due, I afterwards discovered, to my demon being laid up with so violent a sore throat that he could not even swallow. What was my joy at being able to go to bed sober, to wake without a headache, to feel my bad symptoms slowly disappearing, to recover my nerves! For a whole fortnight I was happy—so happy that I even believed the improvement would last and that the old man was penitent. One day, after fourteen days of a veritable earthly paradise, I was walking along the Strand—for I was no longer afraid of venturing out—and met my old manager, Juliet's father. He greeted me with a warmth that was quite touching under all the circumstances. "My dear boy, I have been longing to know your whereabouts. Come and tell me all about it. Have you dined? Let us have some dinner together."

I excused myself and asked after Juliet.

"Juliet is but so-so. Ah do you know, Lucraft, sometimes I think that I did wrong to part you. And yet, you know, you had no money. Make some, my boy, and come back to us."

This was hearty. I forgot my troubles and my state of bondage and everything, except Juliet.

"I—I—I have money," I said. "I have come into a little money unexpectedly."

"Have you?" he replied, clasping me by the hand. "Then come down and see Juliet. Or—stay; no. The day after tomorrow is Juliet's ben. We are playing at Richmond. We have one of your own parts—you shall be Sir Harry Wildair. I will alter the bills. You are sure to come?"

"Sure to come," I said with animation. "Capital! I know every line in the part. Tell Juliet an old friend will act with her."

We made a few new arrangements and parted. I bought a copy of the play at Lacy's and studied the part over again.

Next day I got over to Richmond in good time. The day was fine, I remember; my spirits were rapidly rising because it was the fifteenth day since I had had one of my usual attacks. I was in great hopes that the old man was really going to change his life and behave with consideration towards me. With the birth of hope, there revived in my heart some of my old feelings. I had a real desire to see Juliet again, but yet the old warmth seemed gone. It was a desire to see one in whom I had once been interested; the desire to awake old memories, which, I think, principally actuated me.

I found the dear girl waiting for me with an impatience which ought to have touched my heart, but which, somehow, only seemed to remind me of old times. My heart was gone—sold to my master with everything else. Mechanically I took her hands in mine, and kissed her on the lips as I used to do. She threw both arms round my neck, kissed me again and again, and burst into tears of joy.

"O Luke, Luke!" she said, "I have so longed to see you again. The time has been weary, weary, without you."

We sat together for half an hour, she all the time talking to me, and I, remembering what I used to be with her, wondering where the old feelings were gone, and trying to act as I used to.

"Luke, you are not growing cold to me, are you?" she asked, as some little gesture or word of hers passed me unnoticed.

"Cold, Juliet?" I replied. "What should make you think so?"

"I will not think so," she said. "It is too great happiness to meet again, is it not? And you are silent because you feel too happy to speak. Is not that so?"

Presently it became time to go and dress.

"Let me look at you, Sir Henry Wildair," she said. "Yes, we shall do it very well to-night. You are not looking, somehow, quite so well as you used, Luke dear. Is it that London does not agree with you? Are you working too hard? Your face is swollen and—fancy—Mrs. Mould says you look as if you had been drinking."

Mrs. Mould was the dresser. If Mrs. Mould had seen me a fortnight before, she might well have said I had been drinking. A fortnight, however, of rest had done wonders for me.

I laughed, but felt a little uneasy.

We rang up at seven.

The house was quite full, because my Juliet was popular at Richmond.

I began with all my former fire and vigour, because I was acting again with her. The old life came back to me; I forgot my troubles; I was really happy, and I believe I acted well. At all events, the house applauded. Between the first and second acts a sudden terror seized me. I felt that the old man was eating again. That passed off, because he ate very little. But then he began to drink, and to drink fast.

It was no use fighting against it. I believe the villain must have been drinking raw brandy, because I was drunk in five minutes. I staggered and reeled about on the stage, I laughed wildly and sang foolishly, and then I tumbled down in a heap and could not get up again. The last thing

I remember is the angry roar of poor old Kerrans, beside himself with passion, telling the carpenters to carry that drunken beast away and throw him into the road. I heard afterwards that they were obliged to drop the curtain, and that the *éclat* of poor Juliet's benefit was entirely spoiled. As for myself, the carpenters carried me out to the middle of Richmond Green, where they were going to leave me, only one of them had compassion, and wheeled me to his own house in a barrow.

In the morning I returned hastily to London, sought my cottage at Islington, and shut myself in with an agony of shame and humiliation.

I was quite crushed by this blow. For the first time I felt tempted to commit suicide and end it all. To be sure I ought to have foreseen this, and all the other dreadful things. Directly my master, my owner, got able to swallow, though he could not eat, he could drink, and ordered the most fiery liquor he could procure, with a view to kill me off and begin with another victim.

But Providence ruled otherwise.

Then began a week of cruel suffering. My master sent me word by Boule-de-neige that he intended to finish me off. My appetite, he said, had been long failing, and was now perfectly contemptible. He complained that I had neglected my part of the contract, that I must have been practising intemperance—the horrible hypocrite—to have reduced so fine an appetite to nothing in a short four months. Therefore he felt obliged to tell me that in a week or two I should probably find the agreement ended. That was his ferocious way of putting it. He meant that in a week I should be dead. His words were prophetic, but not in the sense in which he meant them.

He drank brandy now. He drank it morning, noon, and night. He drank it, not because he liked it, but in hopes of despatching me. I was no sooner partially recovered from one drunken bout than I plunged into another.

I lost all power of walking. I could not move about. I lay the whole day sick and feverish on my bed, or, if I got

up at all, it was only to change it for an easy chair. I could eat nothing.

Then I began to have visions and to see spectres in my loneliness and misery.

First I saw all over again the scenes of my early life—my poor deserted mother; the tramp who took charge of me, the sleep in which I nearly perished; the strolling actors with whom I wandered; the girl with whom I fell in love. Only among them all there hovered perpetually the ugly face of Boule-de-neige, spoiling the pleasant memories, and corrupting the current of my thoughts with his “Cluck-cluck,” and his demoniac grin.

“How you do, Massa Lucraft? How you feel your stum-jack this morning? Ole massa him berry fierce. Him gwine to make the noyeau punch to-morrow. Dat finish um off. Dat work um up. You wait till to-morrow, Massa Lucraft.”

I could only groan.

“You nice young gegleman,” he went on, with a grin. “You berry grateful young gegleman. Massa him gib you thirty pounds a month, and you spend it all in ’temperate courses. Bad; berry bad; dam bad. What you say when you die—eh? Ho! ho!”

The creature seemed always with me during this time. If I opened my eyes I had the feeling that he was hovering about my bed. If it was dark I thought I saw his eyes glaring at me from some corner. If I was asleep he would waken me with his “Cluck.” What he did in my cottage I never knew. The room was filled with the visions which passed through my brain, succeeding each other again and again like the acts of a play repeated incessantly. I saw the octagonal room with the old gentleman eating and drinking. I saw myself at Richmond. I saw myself before the magistrates; and I looked on as an outsider, as a spectator of a tragedy which would end in death and horror.

It was two days before the period allotted to me by my master, at eight o’clock in the evening, as I was sitting in my lonely cottage, expectant of the usual drunken bout, when I felt a curious agitation within me, an internal

struggle, as if through all my veins a tempestuous wave was surging and rushing. I lay down.

"This is some new devilry of the old man," I said to myself. "Let him do his worst; at least, I must try to bear it with resignation." I began to speculate on my inevitable and approaching end, and to wonder curiously what proportion of the sin of all this drunkenness would be laid to my charge.

To my astonishment nothing more followed. The tumult of my system gradually subsided, and I fell asleep.

In the morning I awoke late, and missed the usual headache. I had, therefore, I was surprised to find, actually not been drunk the night before. I rose with my customary depression, and was astonished to discover that my nerves were steadier and spirits higher than I had known for a long time.

I mechanically went to the cupboard and pulled out my cold mutton and potatoes. Who can picture my joy when I found that I could taste the meat again, and that it was nasty? I hardly believed my senses; in fact, I had lost them for so long that it was difficult to understand that they had come back to me. I tried the potatoes. Heavens, what a horrible thing to a well-regulated palate is a cold boiled potato!

At first, as I said, I could not believe that I had recovered my taste; then, as the truth forced itself upon me, and I found that I could not only taste, but was actually hungry, I jumped and danced, and was beside myself with joy. Think of a convict suddenly released, and declared guiltless of the charges brought against him. Think of a prisoner on the very ladder of the gallows-tree, with the rope round his neck, reprieved and pardoned. Think of one doomed to death by his physician receiving the assurance that it was all a mistake, and that he would gather up long years of life as in a sheaf. And think that such joy as these would feel, I felt—and more!

I went to the nearest coffee-shop and ordered bacon, eggs, and tea, offering up a short grace with every plate as it came. And then, because I felt sure that my old tormentor must be dead, I repaired to my lawyers', and saw the clerk.

"Ah," he said, "the poor old man's gone at last! Went

out like the snuff of a candle. His illness was only twenty-four hours. Well, he's gone to heaven, if ever man did."

"What did he die of—too much eating and drinking?"

"Mr. Lucraft," said the clerk severely, "this is not the tone for *you* to adopt towards that distinguished man, your benefactor. He died, sir—being a man of moral, temperate, and even abstemious life, though of full habit—of apoplexy."

"Oh!" I said, careless what the clerk said, but glad to be quite sure that the diabolical old villain was really dead. I suppose that never was such joy over the repentance of any sinner as mine over the death of that murdering glutton, for whom no words of hatred were too strong.

"I think you've got to see our senior partner," said the clerk. "Step this way."

He led me to a room where I found a grave and elderly gentleman sitting at a table.

"Mr. Lucraft?" he said. "I was expecting you. I saw your late patron's negro this morning. He told me that you would call."

I stared, but said nothing.

"I have a communication to make to you, on the part of our departed friend, Mr. Ebenezer Grumbelow. It is dated a few weeks since, and is to the effect that a sum of money which I hold was to be placed in your hands in case of his death. This, it appears, he anticipated, for some reason or other."

"Ebenezer Grumbelow." That was the name which had so long escaped my memory—"Ebenezer Grumbelow."

I said nothing, but stared with all my eyes.

"My poor friend," the lawyer went on, "after remarking that unless you change your unfortunate habits you will come to no good, gave me this money himself—here is the cheque—so that it will not appear in his last will and testament."

I took it in silence.

"Well, sir"—he looked at me in some surprise—"have you no observation to make, or remark to offer, on this generosity?"

"None," I said.

"I do not know," he continued; "I do not know—your

signature here, if you please—what reason Mr. Grumbelow had in taking you up, or what claim you possessed upon his consideration; but I think, sir, I do think, that some expression, some sense of regret, is due.”

I buttoned up the cheque in my pocket.

“Mr. Grumbelow was a philanthropist, I believe, sir?”

“He was. As a philanthropist, as a supporter of charities, as a public donor of great amounts, Mr. Grumbelow’s name stands in the front. So much we all know.”

“A religious man, too?”

“Surely, surely; one of our most deeply religious men. A man who was not ashamed of his saintly profession.”

“Cluck-cluck!”

It was the familiar face of *Boule-de-neige* at the door.

“You know, I suppose,” said the lawyer, “Mr. Grumbelow’s body-servant, a truly Christian negro?”

“Was there,” I asked, “any clause in Mr. Grumbelow’s letter—any conditions attached to this gift?”

“None whatever. It is a free gift. Stay, there is a post-script which I ought to have read to you. You will perhaps understand it. In it Mr. Grumbelow says that as to the services rendered by him to you, and by you to him, it will be best for your own sake to keep them secret.” I bowed.

The date of the cheque corresponded with the first illness of the old man—his affection of the throat. Probably he was afraid that I should reveal his infamous story.

“I may now tell you, Mr. Lucraft, without at all wishing to break any confidence that may have existed between you and the deceased, that a friend of Mr. Grumbelow’s—no other, indeed, than the Rev. Jabez Jumbles, a pulpit name doubtless known to you—intends to write the biography of this distinguished and religious man, as an example to the young. Any help you can afford to so desirable an end will be gratefully received. Particularly, Mr. Lucraft, any communication on the subject of his continual help given to young men, who regularly disappointed him, and all, except yourself, died of drink.”

I bowed again and retired. Did any one ever hear of such a wicked old man? Outside the office I was joined by the negro.

"What have you got to say to me, detestable wretch?" I cried, shaking my fist in his withered old face.

"Cluck-cluck! Massa not angry with poor old Boule-de-neige. How young massa? Young massa pretty well? How de lubly abbadide of de young gegleman? How him strong stumjack? Cluck-cluck!"

He kept at a safe distance from me. I think I should have killed him if I had ever clutched him by the throat.

"Ole massa him always ask, 'How dat young debbel? Go and see, Boule-de-neige.' I go to young massa's cottage daraway, and come back. 'Him berry dam bad, sir,' I say; 'him going to de debbel berry fast, just like dem oders. De folk all say he drink too much for him berry fine constitution.' Cluck-cluck! Ole massa he only say ebberry night, 'Bring de brandy, Boule-de-neige; let's finish him.' Cluck-cluck!"

Here was a Christian negro for you!

"Tell me, what did your master die of?"

"Apple perplexity, massa."

"Ah! what else? Come, Boule-de-neige, I know a good deal; tell me more."

"Massa's time up," he whispered, coming close to me. "Time quite up, and him berry much 'fraid. Massa Lucraft want servant? Boule-de-neige berry good servant. Cook lubly dinner; make massa rich, like Massa Grumbelow."

"I'd rather hire the devil!" I exclaimed.

"Cluck-cluck-cluck!" grinned the creature; and really he looked at the moment as much like the devil as one could wish. "Cluck! dat massa can do if massa like."

I rushed away, too much excited by the recovery of my freedom to regard what he said.

I was free! What next?

First the restoration of my shattered nerves.

There was no permanent injury done to my constitution, because, after all, the drink had not actually gone down my throat, nor was it I who had consumed the gallons of turtle-soup, the tons of fish, the shiploads of cattle with which he had punished me for that woeful signature of mine.

The contract, in some inexplicable manner, affected me

with the punishment of my purchaser's excesses by a kind of sympathy. I remained a strictly temperate man for a month. I recovered gradually the tone of my system; my features lost their bloated look. I became myself again.

And then I sought the injured Kerrans.

It was no use trying to tell him a story which he never would have believed. I simply told him that I was taken suddenly and hopelessly ill on that fatal night. I asked him to remember, which is quite true, how I began the piece with a fire and animation quite impossible in a man who had been drinking; how I had certainly nothing between the scenes, during which intervals I was talking with him, and how the thing came upon me without any warning. If you try, you know, you can make yourself quite drunk with brandy in two minutes. This is just what Mr. Grumbelow did to me.

Kerrans, good fellow, outraged in his best feelings, was difficult to smooth down.

He had asked me to act with Juliet in the hope of restoring to the girl her lost good spirits. I came; the misfortune happened, and she was worse than ever. But he forgave me at last, and allowed me another chance. This time it was not Juliet who threw her arms around me; it was I who implored her forgiveness, and the renewal of her love. I was cold no longer. I left off remembering, and lived again in the present. I was a lover, and my girl was trembling and blushing, with her hand in mine.

It all happened more than fifty years ago. The only record which remains of the events I have described are on the tablet to the memory of Ebenezer Grumbelow in St. Rhadegunda's Church, City; and the little faded scrap from the *Morning Chronicle*, which I always carry in my pocket-book, and which tells the tale of my shame.

Juliet never believed my story, and I left off insisting on its truth.

She lies in Norwood Cemetery now, but we kept our golden wedding ere she died; and children and grandchildren live to bless her name.

THE MYSTERY OF JOE MORGAN.

IF everybody would take the trouble, once for all, to set down his own personal experiences, and no other's, among the world of spirits, we might be spared a good deal of controversy; and those unfortunates, now in the minority, who, having nothing to communicate, do the scoffing, would see the necessity of changing their note. I am in daily expectation of seeing this modification of the enemy's front; I look for the day when they will sing, like Scarron, "*Désormais il faut filer doux.*" But in all ages men have scoffed at the world of spirits—until their first ghost. To those who know and understand, it is curious to mark the sudden change from scepticism—even open infidelity—to the reverent awe produced by a single Appearance. I know by my own experience that the transition is at first almost too great to be borne, like the sudden passage from darkness into dazzling light. It is not, however, my intention to defend or to attack the credibility of the supernatural: I have only set down in plain terms, and for what it is worth, my own single experience among the residents of the other world.

One difficulty I may be allowed to mention. Since so few ghosts are ever seen or heard of, what becomes of all the rest? There are, at present, about 900,000,000 men, women, and children breathing these upper airs. Every 30 years a third of these have disappeared and been replaced. Supposing the process to have been going on for 3000 years, which is not an undue estimate, considering the vestiges of ancient civilisation and a teeming population which surround us on all sides, we get for the number of souls which have been born into the world during that period the total of

900,000,000,000—an army which, allowing $2\frac{1}{2}$ square feet for every one, would occupy 81,000 square miles for mere standing room, or a territory not quite 300 miles square. Of all these 900,000,000,000 how few there are who ever condescend to show themselves to living man! and yet how small a space they occupy all together! It seems to me, speaking as one having but little knowledge of the other world, that the few visits we receive from our ancestors argues a studied slight put upon living men by the majority. After all, the living, and not the dead, are the representatives of humanity.

I was engaged, five years ago, to the young lady whom I have since married. The engagement had little romance about it. We met, we saw, we conquered each other. Eleanor's parents made fewer objections than I feared, my fears being based upon the usual grounds. I was given to understand that the duration of the engagement depended entirely upon myself, and, as I was already perilously near thirty, I hastened to bring matters to a speedy termination. The remarkable hindrance to the realisation of my hopes, arising out of circumstances entirely unlooked for and beyond my control, forms the subject of this paper. It was not a pleasant experience, and yet it gives me a sense of pleasure to recall it; just as an old salt will delight in dwelling on the dangers of the ocean. There is nothing, strictly speaking, horrible about it. At the same time, when I write it down in cold blood, I am conscious of a tingling of the nerves and a tendency to look over the left shoulder. This, I suppose, will never leave me. It is a distinction, I know—perhaps a small one, like the Companionship of the Bath, or that of the order of St. Michael and St. George, or the queer Turkish decorations with which old Crimean officers love to decorate themselves—but still a distinction. It is not everybody, even now, who can tell of visits from the other world; and the constant companionship of a ghost seems to me—naturally inclined to exaggerate on such a subject—an adventure, perhaps, a little out of the common.

I had taken and furnished, in readiness for my wedding, a small detached villa, some few miles out of London; it

was a new house, with—though I did not think of that—no possible memories of the past to awaken disagreeable thoughts: a pretty little house, standing between a lawn on the front and a garden behind, with stables on one side and a “library” built out on the other. There were the usual trees in the front—a laburnum, a lilac, a laurestinus, a row of limes, enough to shade the house from the road, and give the appearance of privacy such as every Londoner loves. But it was not a gloomy house. It stood east and west, so that the drawing-room, which ran the whole depth of the house, was never without sunshine whenever there might be any going. The view from the back was perfectly cheerful; beyond the garden lay green fields, and beyond these stretched a noble park studded with elms: a bright, cheerful, and comfortable house. On the north, separated by several houses, and out of sight, therefore out of mind, was a cemetery, belonging to a great town parish, newly laid out and, as yet, thinly populated. Had I noticed it at all, I should have laughed at the idea of spectres in connection with so smiling a garden. Ghosts, I might have said, prowl about grim old churchyards whose falling tombstones are green with moss, on whose slabs clings the yellow lichen, where the grass grows tall and rank, and the brambles stretch long thorny arms across the paths, whose worn stones once preserved the names of the long-forgotten dead. They love the old country God’s-acre, piled eight or ten feet high with human mould, where every pinch of dust contains what is left of a life once filled with hopes and fears. But not a new cemetery: not a formal place planted with roses, laid out in gravel walks, and lying round two perky little chapels, which stand face to face, turning up spiteful noses at each other, and breathing a post-mortem defiance. Is there a bogey-ridden boy living who would fear to pass a night in Finchley Cemetery, or dread to sit out a few dark hours alone in Nunhead?

I was mistaken. The truth is that the newness of a cemetery is no proof of its tranquillity. Comparatively rare as are the visits of ghosts, they may come from a

cemetery handselled only a week ago, a mere upstart thing of yesterday, as well as from a graveyard whose long annals are dark with the secrets of a thousand unknown murders. One is never safe, and the only way to insure immunity from these generally unwelcome visitors is, perhaps, to live as far as possible from a churchyard of any kind. I have been particular in describing my house, because I wish it clearly understood that there was not, either about the place or its neighbourhood, any predisposition to ghosts. Nor was there about myself. I am not an imaginative man: there are no poems, romances, or novels with my name to them. I have no patience with people who can forget their own real troubles in reading of those which never happened; and, for the life of me, I cannot have any interest in the loves of anybody but myself. I am not, therefore, a man likely to be the prey of hallucinations. I am no puling poet trembling at a shadow, nor am I one of those poor spectre-smitten imbeciles who turn a branch into a warning finger, and a snow-drift into a sheeted wraith. This consideration makes my trifling experience the more credible.

The situation is this. An unimaginative man of thirty, whose days are spent in business; a new suburban villa; a bright, sunshiny country; neighbours all round one; and a new cemetery a hundred yards' distance from the house.

To this house and to this man the Ghost came.

And in this wise.

It was in August, when the days begin to close in early and it grows dark at eight. I was sitting, after dinner, trying to get sentimental over my approaching happiness, and picturing to myself Eleanor in the easy-chair opposite me. It was a feeble attempt at experiencing the pleasures of imagination, because I could not picture any one at all. Then I took a book and opened it with a yawn. My back was to the window, which overlooked the garden behind the house. The light was fading, but as my eyes followed the lines mechanically, and my thoughts were elsewhere, that mattered little. Outside the house there was a stillness extraordinary—no stirring of the leaves; no breath

in the air ; no voices from my own kitchen ; no sounds from the houses on either side, which were locked up, their tenants being at the seaside ; not even the distant bark of a dog, or the distant roll of a carriage, to show that there was another living person in the world besides myself. Then a curious feeling came over me : I suddenly realised the fact that life may go on in invisible, intangible forms : I looked round me with a shudder : I *expected* something. The room became, without warning, distinctly darker : the air grew chill : I felt cold dew upon my forehead. Remember that up to this moment there was no reason at all—none whatever—for alarm. Yet I became unaccountably afraid. I turned to the window for relief, and there—there I saw IT, for the first time.

It was standing outside the window, a dark shadow, clearly outlined against the sky : colourless, and yet its draperies were like white grave-clothes : shapeless, and yet, somehow, human in appearance. And it had a face. Deep-sunken and lustrous eyes, bright with phosphoric splendour, showed me hollow cheeks, lips that trembled as if with passion, and a frowning forehead. When I turned he raised his hand and shook it at me beneath its linen folds, and then, with that singular movement remarked by all who have conversed and are familiar with ghosts—a movement in which the shape neither glides, nor walks, but changes place—the spectre stood within the room, facing me. I am not ashamed to say that I was frightened.

“So,” he said, with an angry glance, “I have found you at last.”

I made no reply. What was there to say ?

“I have found you out at last, have I ? Now I have you, what shall I do with you ?”

I could only look hopelessly. He pushed one arm outside the coverings which covered it—a long, lean arm, marked with a tattoo representing a ship in full sail, surmounted by a skull and cross-bones. He shook his fist excitedly in my face. I noticed that the air was not stirred by his movements. It was odd, too, that I recovered my courage the moment he began to threaten.

His gestures became more threatening. He repeated twenty times running the question with which he first accosted me: "Now I have found you, what shall I do with you?" It seemed, indeed, as if he could say nothing more.

"Come," I cried at last, "this is fooling. What do you mean by coming to my house like a burglar and carrying on like a madman? Leave off asking what you will do with me. If you are a ghost out of his senses, say so; if not, vary the monotony by saying something else. Can't you swear, man? Can't you relieve nature in the usual manner?"

He groaned and wrung his hands.

"I can't," he said. "It isn't allowed. I wish I could. What shall I do with you? What shall I do with you?"

"You have asked me that a hundred times already. Bah! you are a ghost. Ghosts can do nothing. I used to believe that they did not exist. Now I see that they do. But look here."

I took the poker from the fireplace and passed it through him. Then I cut him down like a guardsman at Waterloo. Then I sliced him in two like a soldier at an assault-at-arms. At each pass of the weapon he ducked, recoiled, and cried aloud.

"See, you cannot resist. I do what I like with you. What can you do in return?"

He raised his hand and struck at my face. It was as if a cold wind blew upon my cheek.

"Is that all?" I asked. "Do that as often as you like."

"You are not afraid of me?" he asked; as if such a thing as a man daring to stand up to a ghost was unheard of.

"You are positively not afraid of me?"

"I certainly am not."

"He is not afraid of me! Man! I am come from the churchyard. See my grave-clothes. I am one from the tombs."

I could not repress a shudder. The old shiver came across me. He saw it at once, and sprang at my throat. To my surprise, what was before as a breath of cold air became tangible. I *felt* his cold grasp with his long, bony fingers at my throat. His face, close to mine, was filled with an eager longing for revenge: his lurid eyes glared in mine: his teeth glimmered in the twilight. It was but for a moment that I

was afraid. Then I rallied my courage, sprang upright, and looked my spectral enemy in the face. As I looked the tangibility of his fingers weakened, the tightness of his grasp relaxed, and his look changed from one of triumph to that of baffled rage. Then he fell back sullenly, and threw himself into my easy-chair, glaring round the room.

"I never allow any one but myself," I said, "to occupy that chair. It is mine. Please take another."

He changed chairs immediately.

"Will this do?"

It was one next to mine. I begged him to take one on the other side of the fireplace, which he did at once. Then I sat down, and surveyed the situation.

I was alone, save an old woman, my temporary factotum, in the kitchen. The people in the houses round were now all away for their holidays. I had a ghost, presumably a lunatic of a dangerous kind, under my roof. It was impossible to get rid of him, unless he chose to go. You cannot push, kick, or throw a ghost out of a window or door; you cannot lock him in one room while you go to sleep in another; you cannot shut yourself up in your bedroom and defy him; above all, you never know what tricks he may be at. Thinking of these things, I became conscious of another *access* of terror—slighter this time. My guest, however, perceived it, and in a twinkling was on me again, with his skeleton fingers round my throat. I shook him off; that is, I regained my presence of mind, and he cowered back to his seat, where he sat, his head on his arm, and his long white clothes clinging to his limbs, a sight never to be forgotten.

"Pray tell me what it means," I said.

"It means that if you were afraid of me I would throttle you like a dog. It means that I am sitting here waiting for the moment when you will realise who and what I am; the injuries you have done me, the wickedness of your life, the loneliness of your position, and your presence with another world. Ha! ha! I see it coming! Your nerves won't stand me another quarter of an hour, and then I shall seize you by the windpipe, and squeeze, squeeze, squeeze the life-blood out of you!"

"You forget," I replied, "one thing. If I find my nerves giving way—which is not at all likely—I shall get quietly up and go into town. It is only half an hour by train. They don't admit ghosts into clubs."

He made no reply to this. Presently he went on again—

"You will have to go to bed soon. You cannot sit up all night."

"How long can you stay here?"

"As long as I please. Ho! ho! ho! I can be with you, now I have found you, morning, noon, and night. When you are quietly in your bed, I shall be sitting by the bedside, waiting for a moment's weakness. When you are at your office in the city, I shall be at your elbow, waiting to find you off your guard. At dinner I shall be behind you. You will not escape me. Sooner or later you will be afraid, and then I shall have you, although you are a bold man, as I know of old." (This was curious, because I did not remember to have seen him before, and he had one of those very remarkable faces which, once seen, are never forgotten). "I thought I might catch you napping when I lit upon you here, all by yourself. Never mind! The time will come. I shall wait. I shall wait."

"Pray explain," I said blandly. "You will wait until I am afraid?"

"Precisely. We ghosts cannot hurt people who are not afraid of us. Our power is only over the cowardly and superstitious—that is, over nearly all mankind. Once the man has the pluck to stand up to us, we are powerless."

"Thank you," I replied. "After that I will take a pipe. Can I offer you one?"

He shook his head.

"A glass of brandy-and-water?"

He frowned.

"Doubless it will do you good to see me take both. . . . Now, my friend, we will talk, if you please. Do you find it cold in that light dress? Shall I light a fire for you?"

"No."

"Would you like a blanket or a railway-rug?"

"No."

"Can I do anything for you?"

"No. . . . Yes. . . . Be afraid of me. Man! think of it; I am a ghost! I am a spectre! I am a spirit! I am a walker up and down the face of the earth. When the dogs see me they wail and cry. When men see me they drop upon their knees. These are coffin clothes! This arm is——"

"My good friend," I replied, "let us enjoy each other's society without mutual confessions. I grant all that you have said. It is very curious and interesting. Not, perhaps, quite so horrible as I might have expected, had I known you were coming, but still—— By the way, you—you hail from the cemetery close by?"

"I do. Ah, villain and traitor! who put me there? I do; and as I was taking an evening invisible stroll, I happened to look in at your window, and saw the man I expected and most hoped to see. Ha! ha! I shall make it hot for that man! . . . So I will, too," he added, weakly, after a pause.

I made no reply, but went on smoking as if he had been an ordinary visitor. His face, which was not without a certain rugged beauty, was stern and lowering. He looked up occasionally with an expression of baffled rage which, now that I was accustomed to it, rather amused me. His features—those of a man under forty—were regular; his eyes were blue; his chin was strong and square; his mouth, which was weak, marred the general effect.

"When I was in that country ship, trading between Rangoon and Calcutta—there, what's the use of raking up the old story?"

"None," I replied, thinking that he certainly must be a lunatic ghost, and making a mental note of the fact as one likely to throw great light on the spirit world. "None at all, unless you like."

"To think that you—you, of all men in the world—never mind!"

"Certainly not," I said. "I am sorry you will take nothing. It is nearly my bed-time."

"When I saw you last, at Brighton, you were walking with her."

That was a little uncomfortable to hear, because I *had* been at Brighton a few months before, when Eleanor was staying there.

"No use talking. What's the good of talk? Come to that, I might remind you what went on, you know, at Yokohama. Eh? What do you say to that?"

"I have nothing to say to that."

"Lord! Lord! some men will brazen out anything! And what about the Hong Kong business? Who promised what—tell me that—if some one walked the plank, and something was thingumbobbed—eh?"

Here was a very serious question. I only shook my head.

"Thingumbobbed," he repeated. "Scuttled, you villain! and the coolies sent to kingdom come? And after that to round upon a man! Why did I take to drink? Why did I go off at thirty-six, with rum-and-water enough to float King Solomon's fleet! Why? why? why?"

"Can't say, I am sure. Shall we say good-night?"

"If you are going to bed, I will go with you. Man! now I've caught you, do you think I shall leave you?"

This was pleasant.

I shut the windows, and went upstairs. He went with me. I undressed and got into bed. Once there, I shut my eyes resolutely and tried to go to sleep. That was impossible. Every ten minutes or so I felt obliged to open them. He was always standing by the bedside, grave, stern, and resolute to do me a mischief, if he could—*If I grew afraid*.

"You are still here?" I asked, when the clock struck two.

"Still here?—I shall be always here!"

I thought of my approaching marriage. It was awkward. A ghost for ever at my bedside: a lunatic ghost thirsting for revenge; angry at some imaginary wrong. Could he be coaxed?

I sat up and tried.

"Come, my friend," I said, "let us make a bargain."

"No bargain."

"You shall come whenever you please to my smoking-room, but not here. Man alive! be reasonable."

"I am not a man alive," he replied. "I wish I was. And whose fault, I ask you, is it?"

"Come, my dear fellow, I put it to you—is it reasonable to intrude into my bedroom and keep me awake? Do you think it looks like good form to take advantage of your—of my inability to turn a spirit out of the room?"

"Do *you* think," he rejoined angrily—"do *you* think it was good form to treat me as you did? Was it reasonable to send *me* to the cemetery twenty years before my time? I shall stay here," he added, "so long as you stay here. I shall be with you day and night. You shall never cease to feel me with you. I will make sleep impossible, and I will trouble your business hours."

"Then," I interrupted, "you are the most malicious ghost that ever walked. I defy you. You may go to the devil!"

He shook his head sadly, and continued that steady watch of his. Always his chin upon one hand, while the white shroud flowed round him, and his face turned to mine with a remorseless gaze.

As I tossed in the bed, occasionally opening my eyes and seeing always that spectral figure before me, a strange horror grew up in my mind. It was not terror. I was persuaded that he would do me no harm, but the sense of being watched, followed, and haunted continually by this reproachful spectre, fell upon me. By some mysterious power he felt it.

"Ha! ha!" he said. The laugh was not a cheerful one. "Do you begin to realise it now? Do you feel what it will be like?"

There was little sleep for me that night. When the day broke I dropped for half an hour into a heavy unconsciousness, awaking suddenly and with a horror upon me that at first I did not understand. Between my eyes and the window, through which the morning sun was shining, stood a faint, almost an invisible shape. The sunlight streamed through it, and it was as shadowless as Schemysl.

"I am here," it whispered.

I rose and dressed. It followed my movements. I saw the spectre now only when it came into the sunlight. Then it was dimly visible, but only, I think, to myself. I breakfasted and went into the city. It came with me. It sat beside me

in the train: it followed me through the streets: it was with me in my office: it came after me up the steps of my club.

The thing grew maddening. If I forgot it for a moment, I heard a whisper in my ear—"I am here." If I managed to fix my attention on the subject in hand, that accursed voice began to remind me that I was neither to sleep nor to work, nor to have any peace for the rest of my natural life.

"What you have done, I shall do—and worse. I shall dog you—I shall haunt you—I shall make remorse and despair do for you what you did to her and to me. I will revenge myself—and her."

What had I done to him? How was I to get rid of this accursed lunatic ghost? By what spell and charm could I lay him for ever in the Red Sea?

The full misery of the thing was yet to come.

The spectre, in the afternoon, seemed to have left me. I even forgot its existence, and dined comfortably. At eight I met my Eleanor, and persuaded her, not thinking of what might happen, to look at some new furniture in what was going to be our joint house. She came. Nothing happened until we went into the garden. As I led her up and down the walk, her hand in mine, she suddenly stopped with a cry.

"Alfred! who has been walking along the sand"—there was an edging of red sand to the gravel—"with bare feet?"

I looked. There were footprints—great gaunt footprints—parallel with my own. I knew at once what was going to happen, and I trembled.

"Nothing, Nelly; nobody. Who should walk in bare feet except a carpenter? Let us go in."

"Alfred!" she cried, "see, they are falling still—the footprints—as we walk. Take me in—take me away!"

It was pleasant! The accursed ghost was setting his long feet beside mine, keeping step so that at every footfall of mine there was a new footprint of his. I bore my girl half fainting into the house.

"What was it, Alfred? what was it? I am afraid. And see—see!—O Alfred—Alfred!"

With a cry of fright, she fell fainting into my arms.

Between us and the window stood revealed that awful figure in its long white graveclothes, pointing its long bony fingers at me, but saying no word.

I took Eleanor home. I implored her to keep silence as to what she had seen. I soothed and pacified her. I assured her that it was fancy—that it was a trick of the imagination—that it was some schoolboy devilry—anything to keep her quiet. And thus I left her, and returned, miserable and maddened, to battle with this demon who had fastened himself upon me.

He was sitting in my chair, with his abominable head, as usual, on his hand.

"I allowed you to go away with the girl," he said, "because I do not wish to do her any harm. But she shall never marry you—remember that. Wretch!"—he rose from the chair and approached me with threatening gestures—"wretch! Was it not enough to interfere between me and *her*? You try to murder the happiness of another innocent girl! Can you ruthlessly——"

"Good heavens!" I cried, almost beside myself with rage. "What madman is this, who is allowed to revisit the earth in graveclothes and torture an unoffending man? What have I done to you, devil or lunatic, that you should persecute me in this way?"

"He asks me what he has done! Think of Madagascar, villain of the deepest dye. Think of San Fran, pirate and crimp. Think of Liverpool docks and Polly. Joe Morgan—Joe Morgan, you were always as brazen a liar as ever stepped, but I did *not* think you would brazen it out to me."

A thought struck me.

"You call me Joe Morgan. I am not Joe Morgan at all. I never heard of any Joe Morgan."

He laughed.

"If you are not Joe Morgan," he said, "I will eat my hat. I mean, of course——"

"Come, this is trifling. I say that you mistake me for some one else. What makes you think me Joe Morgan?"

"Because you are."

"Nonsense. How long since you saw Joe Morgan?"

"Ten years."

"What was he like when you left him?"

"Much the same as you—sanctimonious look, reddish hair, stumpy figure, fat cheeks, just like yourself."

This was flattering.

"Only Joe Morgan did not wear a beard."

"Had this devil of a Joe Morgan any marks?"

"Tattoo marks, like mine, on the right arm. I did him—I mean Joe. He did me."

I drew up my shirt and showed him my arms, white and free from any tattoo mark at all.

He was stupefied.

"Well—I'm—no—I'm dashed. And you ain't Joe Morgan at all? Lord! Lord! what a fool you must have taken me for."

"I did."

"And me to go and let out all the little secrets. Mate, you hold your tongue about that Yokohama business."

"I never thought much of ghosts," I said; "now I shall think still less of them."

"Go on," he said, "go on; let me have it."

"Why couldn't you ask before you came blundering into a house with your infernal long white sheet? Why couldn't you put the question before you began?"

"Why, indeed?" he echoed. "Look here, mate, I'm very sorry for this little mistake—I am, indeed. And frightening the young lady and all. I am the darndest drivelling idiot of a ghost. What shall I do now to make things square again?"

"Do? What can you do, but go right away?"

"Shall I," he said, "shall I appear to the young lady to-night after she goes to bed? I can easily do it, and then explain it all."

"Certainly not; on no account. You are not to disturb her at all."

"Well, then, I suppose I had better go."

"Indeed, that is the only thing you can do. Go at once, and have the goodness never to return."

He began to disappear. I seemed to breathe more freely. Then the shape, which had almost disappeared, started into sight again with a suddenness which brought back the horror which first seized me.

"One word, sir," he said. "I am afraid I haven't come well out of this affair. Now s'pose—I only say s'pose—I can put you on to a good thing. It may be a wreck lying in four or five fathoms Turk's Islands way; it may be buried treasure; it may be only a pot of money; it may be coins, or may be statues: but if I *should* hear of it, and was to come and tell you, it might go some way to getting into your good opinion again."

"No," I replied. "I want nothing, except an assurance that I shall never see you again."

He sighed.

"Well, sir, I feel that I can't go against your wishes. I promise. No malice, eh? When we meet again, which we may, there will be no malice, I hope."

Then he disappeared finally, and I have seen no more of him.

I have often wondered who Mr. Joseph Morgan is, where he lives, and what he has done, and how he managed to offend my ghost.

AN OLD, OLD STORY.

I HAVE always been of opinion that the treatment of ghosts by those other ghosts who yet walk about in flesh and blood is unworthy of our boasted civilisation. We regard with a terror perfectly ridiculous a race of beings whose behaviour has always been beyond reproach; who have never had any crimes to compass, nor any selfish ends to serve; whose appearances—singularly rare at all times—have ever been enforced on them by some strange necessity, or by the desire to accomplish certain definite ends.

The spectre who wrings her hands by your bedside, dressed in her shroud—poor thing, because she has nothing else to put on—does not want to injure you. Why should she? And yet, at her first appearance, the miserable man who sees her sticks his head between his knees, stifles himself with the bed-clothes, and remains in that position till daylight dawns. There are some ghosts who drag chains; others who knock things about, ring bells, and make strange noises. This simply shows bad breeding, but does not prove malice. One is not *afraid* of a man who does not know what is due to social etiquette: why, then, of a spirit? Some ghosts are of a humorous turn. These come round dark corners unexpectedly, and turn up when least looked for behind trees and in country lanes. But we have wags in the flesh, and we are not afraid of them. Whatever else they may do, there is no instance on record of a ghost deliberately appearing with a malignant or mischievous design. They are a kindly, beneficent, well-conducted race, and full of good-will to men. It is in consequence of the singular ingratitude they have experienced for all their kindness that

they have retired for very many years into a kind of seclusion. Wounded and hurt by the suspicion, ill-will, and terror they have caused, they returned long since to their own haunts, and rarely put themselves in evidence. It will be found that, of late years, their appearances have been in almost all cases entirely accidental, and when they were taking the midnight air for a little exercise and change.

Very early in life I formed the project of vanquishing scruples which, I was convinced, stood in the way of much real—one can hardly say tangible—enjoyment. I aspired to the society of the supernatural. I longed to converse with the men *who have been*. With this object, I began to read whatever books I could find on the subject likely to give me information. I could find none. Cornelius Agrippa and Albertus Magnus may have been adepts, but they have left no clue to their secrets; while the ghost stories usually told me, as I know now, were either gross exaggerations or stupid inventions. I attended *séances*, only to discover that if the raps are made by spirits, they are illiterate and vulgar spirits evidently belonging to the lowest social scale, and having nothing whatever to communicate.

I then tried haunted houses. I heard of several, and actually went down personally, offering my services to sleep in the haunted chamber, and question the ghosts themselves. On the only occasion when I was not treated as an intending burglar, and permitted to sleep in the house, I saw and heard nothing.

Accident helped me.

The way of it was this. Six months ago, my friend Philibert Jones deserted his old friends, and created that vacuum which nature abhors in our little whist-playing, pipe-smoking circle by marrying. I have nothing to say against his wife, who adds to the many charms with which Providence has endowed her that special charm, which so rarely accompanies married beauty, of being civil to her husband's old friends. And one of the first things which Mrs. Jones did, after they were settled in their new house, was to ask me to run down and spend an evening with them.

They lived in an old-fashioned house, too large for a young married couple, but adapted for almost any number of interesting events, in the neighbourhood of Weybridge. It stood in its own old-fashioned garden, surrounded by a high red brick wall, and was itself an ancient red brick house, belonging probably to the reign of Queen Anne.

"I got it," said Jones, showing me over the place, "at a somewhat cheaper rate than such a house would ordinarily be let at, in consequence of there being absurd stories about it. The people round here have got an idea that it is haunted."

"I'm sure we have seen nothing since we came—have we, Philibert?"

"Perhaps," said I, "it is haunted by the ghosts of happy marriages."

Mrs Jones smiled, and put her arm through her husband's. I sometimes wish I was married myself; but the fit wears off. Besides, I am too ugly.

After dinner—what a cosy thing a dinner of three is, when everybody means to be pleasant!—we took our claret into the garden, and sat there through the long July evening, while the soft twilight of summer lay upon everything, and the sweet scent of the flowers filled the air. And somehow we fell to talking of ghosts. I found Mrs. Jones's mind a mere blank upon this important subject; and I spoke, from the experience gained by my own investigations, much to the same effect as I have written before, in those valuable preliminary remarks which my readers are already digesting.

The evening passed along. Eleven o'clock struck.

"Come," said Jones, "this won't do—we have been long enough over ghosts; let us come back to flesh and blood—which, in my own case, means a devilled bone. Lucy, dear, go in and get us a little supper."

We had our little supper—a devilled bone—and then a glass of brandy-and-water and a pipe, and then to bed.

It was about half-past twelve when Jones took me to my room.

"You are our first guest," he told me. "I hope you will be able to give a good account of yourself in the morning."

He laughed, and wished me good-night.

Looking round the room, I got into bed. It was not a remarkable room in any way; low—like all the rooms in the house—wainscoted, and consequently rather dark. It was lighted by two windows, looking into the garden. I could not help thinking, as I got into bed, that here was a favourable opportunity for a ghost: an old house, which had been empty for a good many years; a newly married couple, who took it in spite of rumours about it; and a room in which no one had yet slept. Sighing over the small chance that any spirit would avail itself of the occasion, I fell asleep.

I do not know how long I had been sleeping—perhaps not more than half an hour or so. I was awakened by feeling a cold, gentle pressure of the right hand. I was lying on my side, you see, with my right hand sticking straight out of bed, as if to invite some such confidence. Directly I felt the pressure, I jumped to an immediate conclusion that it was caused by some supernatural agency. For a few moments, in the first flush of excitement, I did not venture, for fear of disappointment, to open my eyes. Suppose it should be only the house dog, or even the cat. But no: no dog, no cat, could grasp one's hand! I lay motionless. The pressure continued. I felt—oh, joy of joys!—the distinct grasp of fingers—long, cold, and, if I may use the word of what was unseen, shadowy. I opened my eyes, and gazed, for the first time in my life, upon a Spectre.

It was of the fair sex—a young lady, apparently, of twenty-five. Long light hair—a wealth of it—floated in waves down her back, and over her bare shoulders; her face was clouded with an anxious look; her form—not wholly, but partly transparent—was draped in a white robe, not long enough to hide her pretty feet, which were bare, as were also her arms. The room had been perfectly dark before her appearance; but you require no artificial light to see the supernatural, and a sort of dim and soft radiance seemed to fall from her upon me and the bed on which I was lying, and the room itself.

I need not, I suppose, be ashamed to confess that, for a few moments, I felt upon me that irrational terror which men

generally experience in the presence of visitors from the other world. My first impulse—which I resisted—was to snatch my hand away, and plunge my head beneath the bed-clothes. My next—also resisted—was to start up and stare at her. I may mention here that it is quite reasonable to experience this first feeling of terror, and that to be able to converse with spirits, not only without fear, but with positive pleasure, is a matter of long practice. Two ideas must be firmly seized in order to accomplish this mastery over one's self: first, that no spirit ever wants to do you any harm; secondly, that no spirit could do you any harm if it wanted to. At least, that is my experience. I lay thus, with half-open eyes, pretending to be still asleep, but watching her. She pressed my hand again and again, but I made no response. She stamped her little foot with vexation at her ill-success, and, snatching her hand away, began to walk up and down the room. I sat up softly while her back was towards me, and at her next turn, our eyes met, and she gave a little cry of delight.

"You are awake, then, at last," she said, in a low, sweet voice.

Her voice was indeed the sweetest I ever heard.

"I have been awake," I replied in a half-whisper, "for some little time—ever since you began squeezing my hand, which was so pleasant a thing to feel that I ventured to trespass a little on your patience. May I ask who you are?"

"May I tell you?" she replied, with another question.

"Really," I said, getting bolder, "considering that you are here, that you have spoiled my night's rest, and that you can hardly have come without some reason, your question sounds rather absurd, does it not?"

"True," she returned, smiling. "What I meant was, that you are really not afraid of me?"

"Not in the least now. I was when I first looked at you."

"How delightful! You are the first Man I have met with not afraid to talk with me, since I—since——"

"I think I understand you. Shall we say, to prevent the trouble of explanation, since other days?"

"Thank you—since other days. Even then men seemed

to be afraid of me for my *beaux yeux*. Ridiculous, was it not?" This with a flash of the *beaux yeux*.

"Not at all. I quite understand it. Was it—were the other days long ago?"

"You mean, I suppose, that I have grown old, and lost my beauty. Men were not so outspoken formerly; and it was not considered polite to tell a lady that it—— But there—of course it doesn't matter what you say."

She looked so seriously offended that I hastened to apologise.

"Pardon me, I meant to imply that it could not have been long ago, for the contrary reason."

She laughed, and made me as pretty a curtsy as the scantiness of her dress would allow.

"I thank you very much. But it *was* a long time ago—more than a hundred and fifty years. You would not think so, I am sure."

"Indeed, no. Is it possible? A hundred and fifty years! Really!"

It grew interesting. The little coquette sat down in my easy chair, spreading out her scanty white skirts, and leaning back with an air of great enjoyment.

"I have not had a talk—with a Man, that is, for among ourselves it doesn't count, of course—all that time. I have made several attempts, but the stupid creatures always got frightened. Former tenants, you know. However, now you are come, you will be able to amuse me."

"Certainly, anything I can do. May I be allowed to—to make some slight additions to——"

"To your dress? No, please don't, or else I shall be made aware of the deficiencies of my own, which really cannot immediately be remedied. Pray stay where you are for the present."

But I was too excited to sit still; and, draping myself with the counterpane as gracefully as was possible under the circumstances—there is something, after all, of the Roman toga about a counterpane, properly thrown over the figure—I got out of bed. And then, turning to the looking-glass, in hopes of being able to catch a glimpse of my own appearance, I found, to my astonishment, that my visitor—if I may call

her so—was not the only spiritual occupant of the apartment; for, sitting in a chair, dressed like her friend in a single flowing robe, was another young lady. For the moment my senses reeled; but I quickly recovered. What helped me more than anything else was a clear, ringing burst of laughter from the first apparition.

“Oh dear!” she cried, wiping her eyes. “I haven’t laughed this hundred and fifty years. You *do* look so absurd. But you are a good fellow not to be frightened. Let me introduce you to Lady Bab Charteris, my very particular friend. Bab, my dear, this gentleman has the extraordinary merit of not being afraid of us.”

As she spoke, the features of Lady Bab, which had been indistinct and clouded before, became clear and bright. She was a little younger and, if possible, even more lovely than my first friend. Her hair did not fall in ringlets and waves, but was piled and artistically dressed after the fashion of George the First’s time, which I shall always love for her sake. She dropped me a low curtsy, smiled, and sat down again.

“Alicia, dear, we are very fortunate. And now, sir, I must introduce you, in my turn, to her who had the courage to wake you up. This is no other than the celebrated toast, Lady Alicia Vernon.”

I could not, stupidly enough, remember anything about a celebrated toast of that name; but that was my ignorance. I suppose my face expressed something of my hesitation; for Lady Alicia laughed and said—

“I suppose you have never heard of me? Confess, now.”

“I—I—am afraid——”

“Oh! impossible,” said Lady Bab. “Of course, I should not expect to be remembered so long”—this was said a little anxiously. “Besides, a young woman who dies at twenty-one, unmarried too, really gets such a very short time to make a reputation.”

“We are both of us forgotten, Bab, my dear,” said Alicia gaily. “Of course, we are forgotten. And if either of us were remembered, it would be you, my poor, unfortunate, dear little Bab”—kissing her as she spoke.

It was rather embarrassing, all this. I was standing on the floor, in the most ridiculous manner possible—still with the toga of a counterpane round me, and, as I was well aware, my hair sticking out in all directions. No man, not even the handsomest, can afford to be seen by ladies with his hair in that dishevelled state, like a Somauli Arab at Aden, produced by the pillow. Why a pillow does it, when a sofa cushion doesn't, I cannot tell.

This, however, has nothing to do with my history. I placed the easy chair for Lady Alicia, and invited her to sit down.

"Pray, do not stand yourself," said Lady Bab; "and if you feel yourself at all cold, get into bed. On the whole, Alicia, my dear," she added, looking at me thoughtfully, "I think he would look better in bed—we should not see so much of him, perhaps; and then we could tell him what we want, comfortably."

I made no objection, and once more retreated to the bed, where I propped myself up with pillows and wondered what was coming next. It was all exceedingly novel and interesting, though the ladies would laugh whenever I tried to combine politeness with a counterpane. But no one, with a proper sense of what is due to the sex, can object to being laughed at by a pretty woman.

They both came and sat on the bed, one on each side of me.

Lady Alicia began to talk.

"What a real treat it is, Bab, to talk to a man again! Do you know, sir—what is your name? No, never mind your name—when I touched your hand, I thought you would probably turn out to be one of those wretched creatures that always shriek and run away when they see us? I am very glad you did not."

"So am I," said Lady Bab softly.

"All the good fortune is on my side," I said; and they both smiled prettily.

"I used to come here years ago, and when the memory of Lady Alicia was still alive, with a special object. Shall I tell him, Bab?"

"Why not?" said her friend sadly. "We are both so clean forgotten now that it cannot matter."

"True. Listen, then, to a very short story. This room was my bridal chamber. It has been left exactly as it was—never touched or repainted—on account of me and my ghost. Over the mantelshelf was—for time has effaced it—my portrait, painted by my husband himself, Sir Arthur Vernon. He was a good man, and I loved him; but, like most women, I had not married the man I loved first, and perhaps best." She stopped and sighed. "I knew, but my husband did not, of the existence of a certain secret cupboard in this very room. It is here still. This I used as the depository of certain letters from Charlie, which I did not wish my husband to read, and could not bring myself to destroy. I hid them away there. Then I died suddenly, and the thought of these letters tormented me. I could not endure the idea that my husband, or some one else, might find them; and for years I haunted this chamber. Lady Bab generally came with me, in hopes of finding some one who could be safely trusted with a secret, and who would not be afraid of us."

"And you never found any one?"

"Never, until we found you."

"Then," said I, "trust me. I am at least a gentleman. Let me be your confidant. Where is the cupboard?"

She mounted a chair which stood in front of the fireplace; then she pressed her finger in a certain place and drew back the panel.

Behind it I saw two or three dark packets. "These," she said, "are the letters."

"Will you allow me to take them out to-morrow and read them? Will you trust me with your secret?"

But she shook her head.

"Well," she said, smiling, "it does not much matter now. We are, as you have told us, so utterly forgotten, that a few old love letters make no difference. Beside, even if they were found, there is nothing in them to hurt my fair fame; only they were not from my husband. But you may take them if you please, and read them first, if you promise to show them to no one, and to destroy them afterwards."

"Do you ever see him now?" I asked.

"My husband? Oh! you mean Charlie. No. The fact is, that the poor fellow has been going down hill a great many years, and has become disreputable. However, there you have my story; and it is rather a frumpy old story, is it not? But, my dear, tell him yours."

"What have I to tell him? It is all told in a sentence. A year of London, and routs, and dances, and cards; a toast for a twelvemonth; and then, before even I had time to fall in love with any one, small-pox."

It did seem hard, and I said so.

"Yes," said Lady Alicia, "my case was bad, but poor Bab's was a great deal worse. And so, you see, we are a pair of ghosts; and have been any time this hundred and fifty years."

"Yes," said Lady Bab, with a yawn; "and terribly dull it is, too, at times."

"But you have society?"

"Ye—yes. Oh yes—there's society—of its kind: exclusive society: none but county families. The worst of it is, that one sees the same people always."

"Indeed! I should have thought there would have been a constant influx of new blood—I mean, of new spirit."

"No," said Lady Alicia; "not into certain circles. We retain our prejudices, and we do not like any modern importations. Consequently, we are rather hipped at times for want of amusement."

"*Rather*, dear?" asked Lady Bab.

"Very much hipped, then. You see, we tell each other our stories over and over again."

"But some of the stories must be very good."

"I daresay they are," said Lady Bab, "when you first hear them. However, I never did care to hear them. When a young woman goes out of the world under such melancholy circumstances as I did, poor thing—and unmarried, too—she really has got enough misfortunes of her own to cry over, without shedding tears about other people. But you can amuse us, if you like."

"How can I amuse you? You have only to tell me a way, and I will do anything—everything I can."

"Tell us instantly," said Lady Alicia, "the news of London."

"With pleasure."

I reflected for a moment, and then began—

"After the Irish Church was disestablished, and the new Reform Bill passed, Mr. Gladstone found it advisable, in the interests of the Liberal party——"

"What on earth is the man talking about?" cried Lady Bab. "We want the news of the town. Tell us who is the reigning toast."

"Really, I don't know."

"Here's a state of things!" said Lady Alicia with a sigh.

"I thought everybody would know such a simple thing as that. Tell us the latest Court scandal."

I began to tell them all about the Tichborne case. Directly they found it had nothing to do with fashion, they put their fingers to their ears.

"It's very kind of you, and all that," said Lady Bab, yawning, "not to be frightened at us; but, really, if that is all you have to tell us, I think we might as well go away at once."

"Oh, nonsense," said her friend. "He must have something more. Just at present, of course, he is a little flurried by our unexpected visit. But suppose we come and see you again. Would you like to see us?"

"Indeed I should above all things in the world."

"Then we will come here."

"No, not here. Come to my chambers in the Temple."

"In the Temple? Lady Alicia Vernon in the Temple? Dear me, this is very irregular! Well—if you don't mind, Bab, dear."

"I think I should like it," replied the beauty, "if he has anything amusing to tell us."

"Then we will come. Expect us—to-day is Saturday—next Saturday, at eleven o'clock in the evening. You must be alone; and, if you please, dressed—in the fashion of a gentleman. Keep the letters till then, and we will be witnesses of their destruction. And now, thank you very much for a pleasant talk. We shall be with you punctually."

"Stay one moment, dear," cried Lady Bab—for her friend

was already becoming indistinct. "Do you"—this was to me—"faithfully promise to be alone in your chambers?"

"I do!"

"No wild young barristers to destroy our reputation or compromise us, mind."

"I will be quite alone."

"Do you know what happens to those who break their word?"

I trembled. What could it be?

Lady Alicia interposed.

"We need not tell him, Bab, dear—it would perhaps unhinge his mind. But, my dear man, above all things, be faithful. Indeed, I advise it for your own sake. We have no power to save you if you break your word."

"None," said Lady Bab.

"I will keep it," I promised.

"Farewell, then," said Lady Alicia. She stooped over me as I kissed that slender hand which had no substance, and her long curls fell upon my head in a profusion of colour and softness.

And "Farewell!" said Lady Bab, coldly extending her hand, which I also kissed. "And, remember—*keep your promise.*"

They disappeared.

Lady Bab was, perhaps, the more regularly beautiful of the two; but Lady Alicia, with her bright smiling face and kindness of manner, won my heart, and has it still.

"How did you sleep?" asked Mrs. Jones, pouring out the tea in the morning.

"Never better," I replied—telling a tremendous fib.

"My husband tossed about all night, and had nightmares; heard voices coming from your room—no doubt, in consequence of that little supper, which you might just as well have dispensed with."

I had not slept one single wink. I lay awake with excited nerves and a chilly feeling, which I at first attributed to spiritual influences, until I found that it disappeared on drawing up the blanket. In the quiet night there were no

sounds at all. In the dark room there were no forms to be seen. Could I have been dreaming?

It was possible. Meantime I could not sleep. I recalled every syllable of the short, too short, conversation, not one word of which have I ever forgotten. I called myself a thousand fools for letting my visitors go before the morning. I remembered the appointment for the following Saturday, and I resolved to test the truth of my spectral visitors by the simplest of all methods—a search for the packet of letters.

I would not waste time by searching before daylight. I watched the light grow in the east from grey to red. I lay quietly till the perfect day streamed through the windows, and the July sun was pouring his early rays across the waking world, and then, mad with impatience, I sprang from the bed and began my search.

I knew the exact spot where her finger lightly touched the panel, and I remembered how she drew it back with the greatest ease.

The exact spot I pressed. There was no result. Then I pressed harder still, but there was no movement of the panel.

Perhaps I should succeed if I were to get near the work. I moved the chest of drawers as quietly as I could to the spot, and, standing upon that, began my researches again. The panel was a piece of wainscoting, three feet long by two high, dark in colour, like the rest of the old room. The place where my lady's fingers had rested seemed to be exactly like the rest of the panel. There was no mark of secret spring, no knob, no button or handle. I began to think that I had been really deceived, and that my visitors were only part of a disordered dream.

Then I pressed with all my force, and I made a discovery. A small piece of the panel, an inch square, was cut out of the rest, and replaced with such dexterity, fitting so exactly into its place, that the lines of juncture could not be readily observed. It gave way beneath my thumb with a low grating sound, as if of rusty metal, and as if the spring was out of order: it did not, when I removed the pressure, immediately return to its place.

This, then, was proof absolute.

My heart beat wildly. I expected the panel to slide back of its own accord, but it did not.

I pulled it, using the square aperture as a point of support. It moved an inch or two and then stuck. Whence then the apparent ease with which my lady had moved it? I account for the noiseless and easy pushing back of the panel in the following way. There is a power common to spirits, and not possessed, or even understood, by mortal flesh. It is shown sometimes in the phenomena known as levitations, sometimes in the movement of heavy tables, sometimes in the banging about of chairs, sometimes in the opening and shutting of doors. Vulgar ghosts drag chains by the same curious power. It should be called Spiritual Force; and, perhaps, by a careful collection of the instances on record of its use, perhaps, too, by the voluntary narrative of such experiences as my own, we shall be able to tabulate and classify its results, to estimate the power expended, and to gauge the power possible. Like electricity, it cannot be understood. For that matter, what power can be understood? And, like all natural force, its power is limited.

Lady Alicia possessed force enough to move lightly with her spirit hand a panel which stuck fast; as it was, I could not for a long time move it with all my strength. I succeeded at length, and saw before me the packets I had seen in the night by the luminous glow which emanated from the forms of the Ladies Bab and Alicia. I seized them; looked hastily in the cupboard for anything else which might be there, and proceeded to shut up the panel again as I had found it.

This was not easy, and when I had quite brought it back, there still remained the square inch of wood to which was affixed the hidden spring. This would not be persuaded to return to its place and I was obliged to leave it.

Afterwards, I heard, Mrs. Jones observed the place, and by the aid of the steps, rediscovered the secret cupboard. But this time there was nothing in it.

As for the packets, I opened them and began to read them at once.

Did you ever open a packet of letters, a hundred years old and more—letters from a young girl to her lover, and from a lover to his sweetheart? Nothing sadder than to think of the bright eyes closed for ever, the hopes gratified or disappointed, the tender thoughts which seem, read in the faded ink upon the yellow paper, wasted and thrown away. We forget their influence upon the lives of those who thought them first, and those who read them. We forget how maidenly trust and purity are strengthened, how manly honour is braced, by the belief that each has in the other.

Poor Lady Alicia's letters were as sweet as any that I have ever read, albeit dressed up in quaint, old-fashioned garb, and talk of nymphs and swains. She thought she loved the man to whom she wrote. Very likely she did love him, though she afterwards married another, and learned to love her husband more. I should like to publish the story of that courtship of hers which came to nothing. But I cannot. I am under promise. I read the letters over and over till I knew them all by heart, and I have never forgotten them. If Lady Alicia had given me permission, I would reproduce them faithfully to-morrow, and then the world would be the richer by another pretty idyl, as sweet and fresh as any that have found an echo in the hearts of men.

I awaited the night of my strange trysting with singular impatience. There was a romance so unusual, so out of the common run of things in the whole business—apart from the natural desire one felt to converse again with creatures so lovely and *spirituelles*—that I could not even sit down till the time came.

The leaden-footed hours crept along. I had my rooms cleaned up for the occasion by a supplementary female, to the displeasure of my own laundress. I had got some flowers from Covent Garden; and a small bright fire—for, though it was July, it was a cold, rainy night—was burning in the grate. I could think of nothing else that would please my new acquaintance. Eating and drinking, of course, were out of the question. Pictures and photographs might amuse them, and of them I had plenty.

The Temple was very quiet. Most of the men were away for their holidays ; and my own staircase was entirely deserted, save by a hard-working lawyer on the first floor, immediately under me. In the silence I could hear him clear his throat from time to time, as he went through his papers. But there was no other sound to be heard.

I sat still, waiting. No one came. I put out the lights and sat in darkness, expecting, with a trembling heart, to see the two ladies appear every moment. They came not. I waited till the clock struck twelve. I waited—with a dull, cold feeling of disappointment—while it struck one, two, and three ; and finally, when the daylight began to shine in at the windows, I made a little heap of the papers, placed them in the grate, and, with more sorrow than I can express, set fire to them.

One thing, however, I heard—a faint, trembling music—and a woman's voice singing. And these were the words:—

“ Shadowy dreams and fitful fancies
O'er the sleeper's pillow flit ;
Not a night but has its glances
O'er the bridge where others sit.

Still believe that ever round you
Spirits float, who watch and wait ;
Nor forget the twain who found you
Sleeping nigh the Golden Gate.”

No one will accuse me of ever having written a line of poetry. But was the song a dream altogether ? Or did Lady Alicia sing those touching lines as a farewell ? It may be so—for *I have never seen her since.*

LADY KITTY.

THE curious experiences which follow took place in the most prosaic place in the world and the least likely for such a thing to happen in. Ghosts haunt old places and lonely places, like chambers in Gray's Inn and the Temple, where I have frequently seen them flitting about at night. That is natural, and what might be expected, so far as can be gathered from the very limited knowledge we possess as to the manners and customs of the spiritual world. But no one would for a moment expect the supernatural in the Liverpool Road, Islington.

It is only by the young lady's own permission—she is actually reading what I am writing at this moment—that I am enabled to communicate to the public at large this very interesting and valuable contribution to our knowledge of the supernatural existence.

“Now, do not prose, but get on at once.”

This is my lady's own interruption.

I obey. I was a very poor man, and a bachelor. Being a poor man, I was glad to get a small house, exactly two years and six months ago, in the Liverpool Road, where rents do not run high. My house was a semi-detached villa, as it called itself. It is the smallest villa that ever had the impudence to pretend to be anything but a cottage; but as the rent was low, and my own stock of furniture small, it did well enough for me. The ground floor boasted of one room, with a kitchen at the back. Upstairs were two bedrooms. I engaged an aged female to come every morning at eight, and, after performing the necessary sacrifices to the Goddess of Cleanliness—very odd thing, by the way, that there never was a Goddess of Cleanliness in Lemprière!—to go away as soon as she could.

Personally, I prefer young and comely attendants about me; but the old and ugly come cheaper, and perhaps are less likely to expose one to the breath of calumny.

"Do *not* prose, I tell you," says the voice at my shoulder, "but get on. We shall be all night before you come to ME."

Well, I sent up my half a dozen chairs, two tables, bed, and bath, and the rest of it, and got away from my office—the place where I was a slave to the tyrannical dictates of a board of bank directors, without bowels, appreciation, or generosity. A hundred and twenty pounds a year, if you please, for the services of an imaginative mind like mine!—for the discretionary use, between nine a.m. and five p.m., of a pen which has written verses for the "Family Teapot." A poor fortnight in the autumn, with the holidays of the Church, and the rest of the year on the treadmill, grinding out the figures which add up to such a tremendous profit at the end of the year; and forbidden, by a hollow mockery, to marry until my salary should reach a hundred and fifty pounds a year!

"Etouffé dans la foule,
Faute d'être assez grand—"

Like many a greater poet before me, I bide my time.

"If you do not get on with your story and come to ME, I will worry you and keep you awake all night. Selfish creature! Always thinking about his own stupid misfortunes! As if anybody cared to hear about *them*!"

That is just what I complain of. No one ever cared to hear about them. They would not raise my salary; they would not read my verses—most beautiful things, some of them—they would not appreciate me.

It was on the very first evening that I went into my new house: one of those warm evenings we had last year early in July. I remember it was on Saturday, July 6th. The thermometer had been standing at 84° all day; and, what with the heat, and the hard work of putting up my bed and laying down the carpet in my sitting-room, with the aid of the Aged One—who mostly sat upon a chair and gasped—I was regularly beat; and after smoking a pipe at my open window, thought that I would draw myself a single pint out of the cask which stood,

newly tapped, in my kitchen. I drew down the blind, lit the lamp, and took it with me into the kitchen.

This was not yet set to rights ; that is, the old woman, on being told to put everything in order, had contented herself by piling the few pots and pans I possessed upon the table, and leaving them there. On the floor, by the cask, lay some sand, which had been left there by the workmen when they repaired the hearth : of course, the dear old lady had not considered it part of her business to sweep it up. I looked carelessly at the sand, and then, setting down my lamp, drew my beer. On taking up the lamp again, I observed, to my great surprise, the prints of two bare feet—a child's feet apparently—toes and all, upon the sand. They were side by side, as if the proprietor were actually standing there at the moment. It was very odd. I could swear they were not there when I first looked at the sand. Odder still, while I looked, another footstep, a third, was printed before my eyes, just where the sand left off. Few men, I flatter myself, would have preserved their courage better than I did at that moment of terror. I dropped the beer beside the lamp—putting that out as it fell—and, with a wild shriek rushed out into the little garden at the back. The wall checked my flying feet, otherwise I might have been running to this very day. Brought up short by the bricks, I turned to face the foe, if there were any. Even a worm will turn, and a hare stand at bay, if there is no way open for flight. How much more, then, I the poet, the man of highly-strung feelings—prohibited, too, from running further by a six-foot wall. I stood with pale cheeks and glaring eyes. Nobody ! Nothing ! There was a seat—a plank which did for a seat—at the end of the little garden. I call it a garden, because the landlord did. It had but few pretensions to the name, as it boasted of neither grass nor flowers, nor trees, nor was it more than six yards long. No living thing grew in it, save moss and mildew. As these are undoubtedly vegetable productions, I suppose the landlord was justified in calling the place a garden. I sat on the seat and wiped my face. Two bare feet, toes and all—the feet of a child—on the sand—one more presented before my very eyes : what could this thing be ?

Robinson Crusoe's most fearful experience, that of finding a single footprint—as if the owner of the naked foot had been Jack the Giant Killer or the hero of the Seven-league Boots—was after all a mere flea-bite, so to speak, to mine. Anybody could see, I reflected with trembling, a single footstep: I would do it myself, with half an eye. But to see a pair before me, and then a third actually formed before my face! Robinson, in his most lonely moments, never succeeded in getting further than a single footprint. What could it mean?

I suppose I sat on the bench, revolving what to do, for half an hour. Escape was impossible, except through the house itself. This way was at least open to me; but what a dreadful way! I might, it was true, get over the wall and escape through my neighbour's house, and so probably incur the charge of burglary. Even a ghost seemed better than burglary. Then I began to fortify myself with my own former experience. Once, I reminded myself, I awoke, and saw in the moonlight a female figure waving her arms at me. After half an hour's suffocation under the bed-clothes, I crept tremblingly out of bed, and found that it was a feminine garment—my aunt's—hung upon the wall. Another time—but this was more fearful—I was reading “The Spectre Smitten” in bed on a summer's night. Suddenly the candle went out, and simultaneously with the darkness there came a tapping at the window—slow, measured, and regular: on that occasion my sufferings were even worse than on the first. I pulled myself together a little after an hour or two of the tapping—which was continuous—and found that it was caused by a huge buck beetle.

But neither of these experiences seemed to meet the probabilities of the present case.

The situation was very dreadful. Alone in the house: no light, the lamp upset, the lucifer matches heaven knew where, the candles in the very room where the footprints were—and the memory of those bare little feet in the sand! But the tooth had to be drawn. I must face the danger. Summoning all my pluck, I rose to my feet, and returned—my nerves at the highest point of tension—to the kitchen. I found the candles and the matches, struck a light, picked up the lamp, poured out more

beer and drank it, and then turned again to examine them. There were *five* of them! I stayed not to look any longer, but hurried back with my candles and the beer to my sitting-room in the front, where I threw myself in an easy chair in an ecstasy of terror. Just then, too, my dog, which had been sleeping on the hearth-rug, awoke suddenly, and retreated to a corner, where he crouched, whining and crying as if in terror.

"Now, look here, you know"—it was a girlish voice that spoke, but in cheerful tones—"I am not going to have any dogs about the place. I don't like dogs. So if you and I are going to get along together, turn him out first. If you don't, I shall pretty soon know the reason why."

"Pray," I stammered, "may I ask who you are, and where you are?"

"As for where I am, I am sitting on your table." The dog was staring straight at the table. "As for who I am, that's another thing entirely; and I am not at all inclined to tell you."

"Might I ask to be favoured with a personal interview—I mean a sight of my mysterious visitor?"

"You may certainly ask," she replied, "and as certainly you will not get it."

"Are you a—a—particularly attached to this residence, Miss—may I ask your name?"

"If you mean, do I like living here, I can't say I do; but I'm obliged to live here; and my name is Kitty."

"Why are you obliged to live here?"

"The first lesson I was taught when I went to school was not to ask questions. When I disobeyed, I got my ears boxed—like this."

Did you ever, swimming from the shore, have a jelly-fish strike your cheek? You don't feel him, but you feel his sting. That was exactly my sensation at the moment. I felt a distinct box on the ears, without any justifiable cause or reason for it, because nothing was to be seen. Curiously enough, the physical discomfort caused by the blow reassured my scattered nerves. A ghost possesses terrors which are generally perfectly nameless. You do not know what he or she may inflict upon you. Given the worst, and you are at least spared the shuddering anxiety

which attends the first spiritual manifestations. My ghost was young apparently, petulant, and somewhat quick-tempered. She could box ears. Would she also do anything else?

"I must ask questions, you know. This is altogether such a strange and inexplicable circumstance."

"Not strange at all."

"Pardon me—it is strange to me."

"Then you are an owl. I am left here by my stepmother, and I am going to stay for three weeks more—locked up in this house with you."

"Won't you show yourself to me, then? If we are to talk, we might as well talk on an equal footing."

"Can't be on an equal footing. I've got no things."

"Never mind about your things. Appear as you are."

"You most improper person, I've got nothing at all on. My stepmother took everything to prevent my going out. So here I am. I don't care. Do something to amuse me. I am going to sit on this mantle-shelf and look at you."

I began to be provoked at her off-hand manner.

"I'm glad you've come. I have had rather a gloomy time lately—that is, for the last fortnight, since I've been locked up. Now you shall amuse me. Do something, I say—sing, dance!"

"Shall I read you my poetry?"

"Stuff and nonsense—poetry, indeed! They used to read me Dr. Johnson's poetry, and I always went to sleep. Sing."

I began to sing; but, as always happens when I exercise my light tenor, I was ordered to stop at the third bar.

"Dance, now—dance a minuet with me."

In vain I assured her I could not. She made me clear away the table, and kept ordering me about for three-quarters of an hour. At the end of that time she was good enough to call me the stupidest creature she had ever set eyes on. I wheeled back the table and sat down. It was eleven o'clock.

"May I smoke a pipe?" I asked.

"No, certainly not; no one ever smokes before ladies. I don't like the smell. You may take snuff if you like."

"I don't like," I returned gloomily.

"Well, I am sorry for you, then. But nothing shall induce

me ever to countenance smoking; and as I am going to be here for three weeks, you had better go into the garden to smoke, or it's very little sleep you'll have, I can tell you. I like to make friends with people if I can," she continued; "but I'm not going to be put upon or made uncomfortable, although I am prevented from showing myself by the harshness of a person whom I will never forgive when I grow up—never."

"You are growing, then?"

"Ridiculous creature! Do you really suppose that I am intended to be always a child? And don't interrupt. I say that, although I am necessarily invisible, I can make myself felt, as you know already. How should you like to be pinched all night?"

"I should hope, in the first place," I said severely, "that you would not come into a gentleman's room."

"Should you? Then you *would* be a fool. A ghost may go anywhere, and through anything, without any breach of the *convenances*. But I am sure you would not drive me to extremities, and I do hope that we shall be good friends while I stay. Now, your business is to amuse me. While you are away, I shall amuse myself in the best way I can. When you come home in the evening you will read to me, talk to me, do anything but sing to me. At eleven o'clock you may go into the garden and smoke. It is eleven now. Have your abominable tobacco, and then creep quietly up the stairs to bed. Take off your boots when you come in, and don't make any noise, for I always go to sleep directly I lie down. Good night—shake hands."

She held out a hand which I saw—a little white hand, cold, thin, delicate. It terminated at the wrist, and nothing else was visible. I held it for a moment, and tried to extend my fingers beyond the space where thin air began and the arm should have gone on. I received instantly a tremendous box on the ear, much sharper than the first.

"You dare to do that!" she cried. "Another such attempt, and we are enemies for ever!"

I humbly implored her pardon, and went into the garden. Outside I found my dog, who peered curiously round me;

but, finding I was alone, jumped up to lick my hand. Nothing, however, could induce him to enter the house.

Next morning, nothing: no sound, no indication of anything being in the house except myself and the old woman. Only the dog kept in the garden. I went off to the city with curiously mingled feelings of pleasure, fear, and curiosity. I was, however, resolved on one thing. I would keep everything to myself. None of my fellow-clerks should know of my singular fortune.

The day's drudgery—nine o'clock to five, let me tell you, with half an hour extorted for dinner, is a good day's allowance—over, I got back, walking as fast as I possibly could, to the Liverpool Road.

Not a sound in the house—not a sign to indicate the presence of any one besides myself. I whistled to my dog. But, no—he peered wistfully in at the door, and shrank away. Next I made my tea and drank it, beginning to think that after all it was some strange and disordered dream.

Seven o'clock struck.

"Well," said the voice I knew, with a suddenness which nearly shook me off the chair—"well, are you rested enough? Have you had plenty of tea? You've been long enough, but I would not disturb you before. And now, put away the things and let us talk."

That meant, let her talk. She went on for four hours with a long and unceasing prattle. She told me things that she had seen; what her own life had been; and, though she was singularly reticent about her present condition, she gave me to understand that she was happy enough, and expected to be happier when she was no longer in a state of tutelage.

"I *came over*," she said—it was a curious phrase, as if she were an emigrant, but quite intelligible—"I came over about a hundred years ago, or it may be a little more. I was about ten years old then, so I am fifteen now, at the rate of five per cent., which is all we are allowed till we are twenty-one. After that it does not matter, of course."

"Oh, of course," I replied.

"And why of course? Pray don't expose your ignorance.

It's a piece of condescension my talking to you at all, because my father was a duke—the Duke of Reculver—and I was Lady Kitty Reculver—you know *that* name at least, I suppose?"

I bowed a mendacious assent, because I did not know it at all.

"My father was a minister. He was not a very wise one, I believe, from what I have heard since. But perhaps he was as good as most. I am inclined on the whole to think, though, that he was not so wise as the generality of people; because, after my mother left us, he married my stepmother, the second great-great-dowager-duchess, you know. Any man who could do that *must* be weak in the intellects."

"Pardon me," I said, "but does it not become awkward, that kind of title—great-great-great, for instance. How when you get to the tenth or twelfth?"

"Oh, we very seldom experience any difficulty. In the case of houses like the Montmorencies of France, they have adopted an algebraical method. Instead of saying great-great-great, for instance, they say great-cubed. This saves a great deal of trouble. Well, when I was ten, you see, the second great-great-dowager and I came over together—typhus fever, or something disagreeable; it matters little now what we call it. I remember being a good deal annoyed at the time. So you see, by the rules, I am under her guardianship till I am grown up and can do what I like. When I do anything wrong, I get locked up in empty houses for so many weeks. That's my case now. A mere trifle, too—not fit to make a fuss about. What she called a breach of etiquette. Rubbish and nonsense! I haven't common patience with it. But don't ask me. We are absolutely forbidden to tell people on the other side about our life, and I should catch it tremendously if it were known that I have told you as much as I have. Tell me about yourself. Are you rich? No, I see you are not. Good family? I suppose not. Not that I care at all about it. There are not a dozen good families in England, and a generation or so is of very little importance to a Reculver. We date beyond the Deluge, you know, our

ancestors having had the singular good fortune to escape by getting to the top of Snowdon. It isn't true, but that is what is always said in our genealogy."

"I suppose I am not what you may call of regularly good family," I replied—because on this point I am a little touchy—"but my father was the Rector of Muddleborough, in Norfolk; and my uncle failed for forty thousand pounds as a——"

"Parish pump and beadle!" she replied rudely. "My dear good sir, do you think I should consider you of a bit more importance if your venerable papa—he reads prayers for us sometimes in his new position—had been a bishop? What fools men and women are, to be sure! Go on with your story, however. It promises to be as interesting as a novel. Oh, that you had one to read to me now!"

I told her all my story, which wasn't much after all; though somehow, the subject possesses the deepest possible interest to myself. I had nearly finished, and was dilating on the difficulties of living on a hundred and twenty pounds a year, when she broke in upon me, in her impatient way—

"I really did not imagine that so extremely stupid a story could have been made so long. Why, man, don't you see that you don't get on because you haven't got any push? What made the Reculver family? The man who pushed his way to the top of Snowdon when the waters were rising. I'm only a young thing of fifteen, with no more experience than a paltry hundred years or so can give; but I know this, that the waters are always rising. And if you want to get out of the mire, you had better make a fight for it."

I shook my head. It was no use thinking of making a fight of it in the offices of any bank in London. All very well to talk.

"And haven't you had the spirit to fall in love yet?"

Now, it was very odd that in the story I told her I had omitted all mention of my Emily. That was, perhaps, because I thought she wanted to hear about myself. Vanity! Only the cases are very rare where ladies like to hear about other ladies.

I told her about Emily. Engaged for five years. Hopeless

to think of marriage. Best and most patient of girls; also the prettiest.

"Prettiest!" she said. "Rubbish and nonsense! You men are all alike! You think every girl an angel. Dowdy little thing, I'm sure! Can she do anything?—dance minuets, play the harpsichord, work embroidery?"

"N—no—I'm afraid not. But she can make puddings."

"Ah! very useful, no doubt, in your sphere of life. You don't mean—you can't dare to mean—that she is prettier than ME?"

I ventured, with respect, to explain that I could not tell, because I had never seen her.

"Light the two candles as well as the lamp, and you shall see."

I did so; although two candles *and* the lamp is an expensive job. I immediately became aware of a presence—a face and head, terminating where the dress should begin—with two little hands, but not the arms; and below, on the footstool, two little tiny bare feet—the prettiest feet that ever were seen. But ah! such a face—such a beautiful face!—with its delicate little rosebud of a mouth, its dimpled chin, its full deep-brown eyes, and its wealth of long, dark-brown hair, that hung down behind in waving curls, disappearing where the dress would hide it! A sweet child's face, or a face of budding womanhood. She looked at me, as Venus herself would have looked at Paris, with a smile of conscious superiority—of immeasurable superiority. I gasped. I fell upon my knees. I begged and prayed of her to remain in my sight a little longer—only a little longer.

"Not so beautiful," I said—"by a thousand times, Emily is not so beautiful as you! O Lady Kitty! tell me if all the ladies of your time were so lovely as yourself?"

"Not all; but some. The Miss Gunnings, for instance—pretty, but made-up, padded things. But, there, you wouldn't know if I were to tell you. So, my pretty lover, you are unfaithful already! Your Chloe is not so fair as Clarissa."

"Nay," I replied, "not so fair; but yet I love her. We mate only with our own degree. I thank you always, madam,

for showing me—what else I might never have known—what true beauty means. Would that I could see you as you are—I mean as you might be—in a dress suitable to your rank and beauty! Oh, do not, do not fade!”

There never was a girl so kind and thoughtful. She remained in my sight for a full hour. I am not an artist, or I would have sketched her as she sat. But every line in her face—if her face could be said to have had lines—is deeply engraven on my heart. I can never forget her if I would, and I would not if I could.

A whole hour! And it was not the only time that she condescended to appear. Night after night I was privileged to kiss her beautiful hand, and to gaze upon her lovely face; till the features of my poor, good little Emily, down away in her Essex farmhouse, seemed coarse and rough to my imagination. Night after night, for three weeks—all too short!—she sat in my little room, turning solitude into Elysium and loneliness into happiness. The debt of gratitude I owe to her can never be repaid. But there was more yet; for one night she said suddenly to me, without any kind of preamble—

“Roderick”—that is my absurd name: I was only a few weeks old when they gave it to me, and I remember I had not the courage to protest before so many strangers; nor, indeed, at all, until it was much too late—“Roderick, I have had my term of imprisonment greatly lightened by your care and trouble. I have been thinking how I might be able to do something for you. The best thing would be, I suppose, for you to marry your Emily as soon as you can.”

“I can’t. I have only got a hundred and twenty pounds a year.”

“So you’ve kept on saying nearly every night, till I’ve really got almost tired of hearing about it. Well, you know, if I were older, or a scientific ghost, or a mining ghost, or an antiquarian ghost, or anything like that, I daresay I could give you a lift, in a practical sort of way, by telling you where pots of gold are buried. As I’m only a young girl, I don’t know anything about pots of gold, and don’t want to. But I tell you what I might do for you.”

I listened with all my ears. Could it possibly be that my Lady Kitty was really going to do something for me?

"We all take a particular delight in watching the fortunes of our own house. We do this, if I may so explain myself, by influencing the minds of our representatives. Sometimes we do this injudiciously, because we can't be any wiser than we are made, can we now?"

"Surely not," I said. "I know that from my own sad experience; and he who hopes——"

"But we may be foolisher," she returned sharply; "so don't go on with what you were going to say. You are really a good fellow in your way; and if your wife only cures you of your propensity to prose and make goody-goody remarks, you may turn out a useful sort of man, without ever having had very much go. Now listen to me!"

She was sitting opposite to me, in my easy chair: that is, her head was visible in the chair at the altitude at which a head might be usually found when a young lady is sitting there. I had got so used by this time to seeing the head by itself that I thought nothing at all of it, and only occasionally noticed the curious gap beneath it, which revealed the chair behind. I should have said that no mistiness or cloud interposed to hide the chair, but that it was exactly as if nothing at all was there. Habit, you see, makes one accustomed to everything; and my imagination even filled in the flowing robes, for want of which the poor dear girl could not show herself before me. Her dear little fingers were interlaced in such a position as to lead me to suppose that she was resting her elbows on the arms of the chair. I may add that, after the first night, she made no scruple of letting me see her feet, as well as her face and hands.

"Listen to me, now. When any one of our house does anything very good or very bad, they say it is hereditary influence in the old blood breaking out. Very well; now I am going to show to you exactly what hereditary influence means. You only read the columns of the *Times* advertisement sheet for the next fortnight, and when you see an advertisement from the Duke of Reculver, take care to answer it at once.

The young Duke has just left college. He is full of ideas about improving the estates and his people. He imagines himself to be an old feudal lord, with the interests of everybody depending on himself. Now, he cannot manage everything, and he will want a private secretary—that is, you; a man of business habits—you; accustomed to writing letters—you again; ready to give up all his time to business—you, you see; about thirty years of age—you, once more. Need I say more? Yes, one thing more. You had better, in the meantime, study what I discover you are painfully ignorant about—the genealogy and history of the great Reculver house. And now, my dear friend—for we are in reality friends—we must part. My captivity is over, and I return to my own people. Forgive my little tempers and tantrums: I know I have them. When you go to the Duke's presence, I will try to be there and prompt you, if you want any prompting. Farewell."

She rose—that is, the head rose—and the hands parted. She held them out to me. I took them in mine, and kissed them—the prettiest hands that ever were seen. She smiled a farewell, and then, with the sweetest grace that ever gentle lady showed, she said to me—

"In my time, men saluted a lady on the lips. You may, if you would like to."

This condescension—so much greater than I had any reason to expect—overwhelmed me. I leaned forward, and with as much deference as I could put into my manner—it was not much, but as much as you could expect for a hundred and twen—I mean from a city clerk, and a good deal more than you could get from most of our fellows—I kissed her on the forehead and on the lips. Then I looked round the room, in a sort of bewilderment, and was roused by my dog scratching at the door. He came in, for the first time since my guest had been with me, and sat down as unconcernedly as if there had never been anybody there.

I bought the "Peerage" a second-hand copy—cost me eight shillings and sixpence—and studied the famous history of the Reculver house. Then I read the whole of the advertisements in the *Times* every day for a fortnight without

success. At the end of a fortnight—that is, on August the 10th—I saw the following advertisement:—

“A nobleman is desirous of finding a private secretary. He must be of business habits, not more than thirty years of age, accustomed to correspondence, and ready to devote his whole time to his business, which will be partly that of a steward.—Apply to K., etc. etc. etc.”

Now, anybody who doubts my story may just look up the *Times* for that date himself. If he does not find the advertisement precisely as I have quoted it, let him write me down fibster, fiction writer, inventor, teller of tarradiddles. *But it is there!* I answered the advertisement instantly, setting forth my own qualities, and referring to my directors for references.

On Monday afternoon a reply came:—

“The Duke of Reculver will be glad to see Mr. Roderick Leigh on Tuesday morning, at eleven o'clock, at his private residence.”

I got leave of my manager. I went to the Duke's private residence—a magnificent mansion behind St. James's Palace. In trembling and trepidation, I was ushered into the room. The Duke looked at me—he was a young man of three and twenty—with curiosity for a moment, and then motioned me to a chair.

“You are acquainted with the House of Reculver, Mr. Leigh?”

“I believe, your Grace, I could even pass an examination in the genealogy of your family.”

“That is very curious. You are fond of genealogical studies?”

I bowed.

“Well, now, a simple question.”

When he first spoke, I saw the fair face of my own dear Lady Kitty smiling at me behind him; but this time I saw her whole form, wrapped in some wondrous silk that swept

behind her, as she whispered in his ear—and he, as if speaking at her dictation, asked me—

“Can you tell me who was Lady Kitty Reculver?”

“She was your Grace’s great-great-aunt. She died about the year 1772, of typhus fever, at the same time as the Duke’s second wife. Lady Kitty was only ten years old at the time of her lamented death, but already gave extraordinary promise of wit and vivacity; and was, besides, like most of the ladies of your Grace’s family, of singular beauty.”

“Very good,” said the Duke, smiling; while Lady Kitty, behind him, nodded and smiled and clapped her hands.

He asked me a few more questions, and then dismissed me. As I bowed on departure the dear girl behind kissed her hand to me, nodded, laughed, and jumped for joy. As I was leaving the room, he called me back.

“Mr. Leigh, one moment. I am about to make inquiries of your directors about you. See this pile. It is a pile of 635 letters, all answers to my advertisement, from men in every position and of every age. They will all go into the waste-paper basket if my inquiries prove satisfactory.”

I am now secretary and steward to the Duke. I know every scrap of his family history, and everything about his estates. I have been married two years. I am the father of a little girl. She is not like her mother at all, who has blue eyes, because her eyes are brown as well as her hair. I have called her, with his Grace’s permission, Kitty. The Duke is the kindest and best man that ever lived. I am as happy as I can hope to be, but for one thing—I have never once seen my Lady Kitty again, though she condescends to pay me a flying visit, and speaks to me at odd times, when I am alone, and Emily out of hearing. I dare not tell the Duke, my employer, or Emily, my lord and—I mean, my obedient wife—a word of the matter. O lovely Lady Kitty! It is not, I hope, infidelity to an excellent wife to acknowledge that, while I regard her as some divinity too fair and good, as well as too ethereal, to be loved by a humble mortal like myself, her image dwells in my heart, and will never leave it.

THE OLD FOUR-POSTER.

ON the east coast there are two or three fashionable watering-places, and about fifty unfashionable. To one of these last, carefully selected as being one of the most unfashionable—only two lodging-houses and a country inn—I betook myself last August, with the intention of remaining there a month.

I was no more jaded than a man ought to be after a year of not too hard work, and no great amount of dissipation and society. My nerves were not out of order, nor was my brain giving way under that pressure which sets in with such violence about the end of the season, and of which we hear so much between the end of term and the beginning of October. And I was not contemplating an epic, or a novel, or a five-act play. I simply went down to enjoy myself in a solitary way—to sail, bathe, fish, stroll about, read novels, and smoke pipes.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when I got down there. The last eight miles of the journey were done in an omnibus, which they called a coach. One family was at my watering-place, and only one. I ascertained from my driver that I might choose between the other lodging-house and the inn. There were, it appeared further, no German bands and no barrel organs; there was no circulating library and no assembly rooms. In fact, civilisation, with its march, that we hear so much about, had not come this way; though its tramp was distinctly audible not many miles away.

The inn was that pretty kind of inn which they represent on the stage—a low, two-storied house, with a porch, and creepers clinging all over the front. On the right was a little

“parlour,” as they called it, which was at my service; on the left was the bar, furnished with the usual display of pewter. There was a fragrant smell of thyme or of lavender in the bedroom; there was a garden behind the house, all dreamy with the hum of bees and the scents of old-fashioned flowers—stocks, wallflowers, hollyhocks, London pride, and the like; and about a quarter of a mile away was the sea-shore, with a long murmur of waves.

The landlord, regretting the absence of his good woman, brought me a little dinner of some fish and a chicken at five. The ale was excellent; and after dinner I sat in the garden and smoked in great content, watching the glitter of the light in the leaves till the sun went down, when I returned to my parlour and got some tea. In the twilight, I went out for a stroll by the shore. It was very quiet. The family in the lodging-house were apparently all gone to bed. There was not even a coast-guard to be seen. I undressed and took a hasty dip, and then went back to the inn. Here I drank a single glass of brandy-and-water, and went to bed. You will observe that the day had not been exciting.

There were two beds in the room—which was much larger than one generally finds in a country inn, and extended along the whole front of the house. One of these, which I had not noticed in the afternoon, was a grim, dismantled old Four-poster, occupying a good half of the room. My own was a little iron bachelor’s bed—one of the pretty little French things—but the other was a sort of ancestral state bed. That is, it had been. Now its cumbrous rigging was all pulled down; the curtains, rings, and hangings had been taken away and carried off; the mattresses and valance removed; and only the four bare posts, with the sacking of the bedstead, remained. The posts seemed to preserve something of their ancient dignity; and it was not without pride—the last possession of a ruined gentleman—that the old skeleton towered in its fallen state.

I was glad to look at the contrast of the little French bed, gaudily painted in green and gold; neat and tidy; open and low—suggestive of quiet slumber and peaceful dreams, with

a waking, early in the morning, to find the early sun streaming in at the window, and the twitter of birds inviting one to be up and away, plunging in the cool waves.

At present, however, the full moon was shining, clear and bright, into the room. I opened the window and looked out. I could see its long silver light upon the water, and hear the roll of the sea on the beach. There was no other sound—not even the barking of a dog; and, with a murmur of congratulation at having found a place so quiet and so pleasant, I turned into bed, and fell asleep.

The bark of a dog—a door slamming—the sound of many voices—the tread of steps on the stairs! What is it? I am a fool to waken so suddenly, and a greater fool for not going off to sleep again at once. I address myself again steadily to slumber; think only of soothing things; shut my eyes hard; lie in the most comfortable posture. But all of no use. My feet are wakeful and restless: they kick of their own accord. Something tickles my nose. Something startles me just as I feel myself dropping off. This evidently will not do. It has just struck twelve, and there are yet three hours before the dawn. I remember the advice of Franklin. He recommends you to get up, shake the pillows together, lay the sheets straight walk about the room for five minutes, and then try again. I get up, shake pillows and smooth sheets, walk about a little, and open the window. The moon is throwing her light full upon the gloomy old Four-poster.

Broad daylight. A delicious cool breeze comes in at the open window, and awakens me. I sit up and look round, trying to remember things. Then, suddenly, I become aware of a most singular circumstance. I am lying on the bare sacking of the Four-poster.

A cold shudder ran through me as I vainly tried to remember how I got there. I could not remember anything beyond looking from the window, and noticing the moon on the old bed, and my own shadow on its sacking. A sort of terror came upon me, and I precipitately got up and retreated to my own bed. Then I gradually got warm, and

reasoned myself into the belief that I had been sleep-walking, or had lain there for coolness. As for the troubled feeling, the sense of something terrible which had happened and been forgotten, I put it away from me—it was the effect of a strange bed and too many pipes. I got up, bathed, and came back refreshed and jolly. It was the loveliest day—a day on which a wanderer's conscience would be soothed and quiet—a day when London is hot and heavy, and the Downs are cool and bright—a day for a long walk to clear out the cobwebs of the brain, to forget regrets for wasted opportunities, and to build anew gorgeous dreams of things that might yet be. I used the day well. I walked along the low, breezy cliff, by the sea-shore, where I met no one but a man who, I have reason to believe, was a poacher; at least, the ears of a hare were sticking out of his pocket. But he was not a noxious animal, and answered me in a sufficiently civil, if not friendly manner.

After some six or eight miles of walking, I came upon an old ruined abbey, with a small church of modern construction in its precincts, and a very old churchyard. Beyond the abbey stood a few houses of a village. The ruins were not much to look at. Three walls remained and the places where once were the windows; but of these the very tracing was gone. Ivy clung over all the walls and seemed to keep them up; but the abbey was long since roofless and desolate. I was reminded of my old Four-poster, and made out my fanciful resemblance; thinking how a mantle of ivy would improve the appearance of that venerable relic of antiquity.

Then I turned into the churchyard and tried to read the epitaphs, but I found nothing remarkable. In a corner of this God's-acre was a comparatively new monument. It was a tall and rather graceful cross of white marble. In the centre of the marble I read the inscriptions. They were to the memory of Charles Arthur Clynton, drowned accidentally August 16th, 1838, aged twenty-eight; also of Lady Alice Clynton, his mother, died in December of the same year; and of Clara Helen Swinford, died about six years afterwards, aged twenty-five.

I sat down and thought of the mother's grief: died, too, four months after her son—probably broken-hearted.

And who was Clara Swinford? Perhaps his wife that was to be; and she, too, only survived him six years! Then I surprised myself with a big tear, which fell copiously—if I may so express myself of a single tear—into my beard and lay there like a pearl. I am not generally given to cry over other people's misfortunes, being quite of the opinion that a gentleman can find plenty to cry about in considering his own. So, for fear of another, I rose and addressed my steps homeward, still thinking of the terrible tragedy commemorated by that marble cross.

In due course I got through the day. Making acquaintance with a seafaring man—not unconnected, as one may say, with the fishing interest—I accepted an invitation to go trawling, or dragging, or something else, with a boat and a net. I dined at five, had another stroll by moonlight, and went to bed at ten o'clock well tired. The first thing that caught my eye was the confounded skeleton of a bedstead, and I got into bed with words on my lips that should have been, but were not, part of an evening prayer. And then I fell asleep without more ado.

What is it? I am awakened, not naturally, but suddenly and rudely, as if I had been *shaken* into consciousness—thoroughly, however; and I sit up in bed, startled, confused, and terrified. The church clock is striking twelve. The moon is shining full on the sacking of that preposterous great bedstead, exactly as it did last night. And then the remembrance of last night comes upon me, and I begin to shiver and tremble. It is too absurd. I lie back, and try to get to sleep again; but it is of no use. Curiously, too, the words on the tombstones are ringing in my ears: "Charles Arthur Clynton, aged twenty-eight; Lady Alice, his mother; and Clara Helen Swinford." Poor Clara. Poor dear Cla—a—— There's a yawn. I am positively getting sleepy again. "Also, to the memory of his mother, Lady Alice." Hang Lady Alice!

There are footsteps in the road: a noise as of men talking in whispers: footsteps in the garden: footsteps in the house. I cannot remain in bed. I leap out, open the window, and breathe the cold night air. There is a confused and shuffled tramp up the stairs; then along the passage. They stop at my door. The

door, which I had bolted, swings open. What is it that makes my heart freeze, and my eyes glare, and my limbs stiffen with a momentary horror? What is this nameless dread that comes over me? Why do I stand in this helpless way, staring at the open door? For I cannot move—I can only watch and wait. This kind of paralysed horror is momentary. It passes from me, and I can again lift my eyes and turn them round the room.

It is all changed. The great bed is hung round with curtains, and tassels, and fringes. Clothes are hanging about. There is an old-fashioned toilet table, covered with brushes, jewellery, and rings. The chairs are littered with riding-whips, gloves, and spurs. The table is loaded with books. Lighted candles stand upon the dressing-table, and the moon seems to have disappeared altogether. All this I saw at a glance and then turned to the door.

In the passage were half a dozen men, adjusting a burden. Presently they all came in, bearing—something! What was it? Five of them were rough, fisher-looking men, in sea-going dress. Before them came an old man, in some sort of livery, weeping. But they all had heavy, mournful faces; and all bore their burden in a reverent, careful way. They put it on the bed, and lifted the cloth. O God! it was a dead body!—the body of a young man—his eyes open and staring—his cheek pale and ghastly—his jaw sunken—his long fair hair dripping with water and matted over his forehead: a week ago a tall, strong, handsome man. They put up his fallen jaw, and closed his eyes, and laid a handkerchief over his face. And then one of them spoke in a hushed voice, as in the presence of Death's handiwork.

"I found him," he said, "off the Clewin Rocks. He was beatin' about in the waves, and his poor arm was nigh crushed to pieces. See here!"

He lifted the coverlet from the arm, and I saw—oh, the piteous sight!—the delicate shapely hand bent over and crushed into the arm which, bruised and broken, lay upon the bed.

"I picked him up, but couldn't get him into the boat till John Cross here, he come alongside and helped me. D'rectly we got ashore, we sent up to the Hall."

I don't think I was afraid any more. The fear had passed away very quickly; and left curiosity, with a sense of something wild and strange. I waited to see what would happen next. Nor had I to wait long. Presently, there was the sound of horses' feet and carriage wheels, which stopped at the house. Then light footsteps on the stairs. And once more the door flew open. Two ladies, dressed in black, came in. Their eyes were red and swollen; but they had no tears, and no words of sorrow. They stepped quietly to the bedside, the rest silently parting to make room for them. Then the elderly lady spoke—

"Take the cloth from his face. Let me see my boy."

The old man interposed.

"Don't ye, my lady—don't ye, now!"

The poor old man. He dropped on his knees, with his face in his hands, and his whole frame shaking with sobs. I do not know which was the most pitiful sight, the grief-stricken old servant, or the wan-cheeked women.

But they took the cloth off; and the elder lady gazed long and sadly upon the features she was to see no more. The girl clung to her arm, and, after a single look, hid her face.

At last she replaced the handkerchief. One of the men, with a rough grace, took a pair of scissors from the table, and cut off two locks of his fair silken hair, giving one to each.

"It hardly needs," said the mother.

But the girl hid hers in her bosom, with a convulsive sob.

"Come, Clara—come, my daughter," said the mother, and led her to the door.

As they disappeared in the dark passage, I heard the girl sob out, heart-broken—

"O Charlie! Charlie!"

The bitter hopeless sadness of the scene came upon me like a flood, and, unable to restrain myself, I wept aloud.

Then it seemed to me as if the faces of the men turned to me curiously and inquiringly; and then all of them slowly faded away and disappeared. I was standing in an empty room. The door was shut. The cold night air blew upon me from the open window, and my shadow lay, in the moonlight, on the sacking of the dismantled old bedstead.

Then I felt my heart grow cold and sink within me; and I remember nothing more.

Again I awoke, as the morning sun came in at the open window; and again I found myself, cold and shivering, lying on the bare sacking of the bedstead. This time I had no difficulty in remembering everything; and I got up, dressed, and took a bath and a walk to recover my nerves.

When I came back to breakfast, I found that the landlady had returned. She saluted me curiously, and inquired how I had slept. I thought she meant more than mere courtesy, and replied by a tremendous fib—

“Pretty well: but there was a good deal of disturbance in the night.”

“There was, sir,” she said gravely. “And if I’d been at home before you went to bed—which I wasn’t—not for fifty pounds should you have slept in that room—last night, of all nights in the year.”

“And why not last night?”

“Last night is the night we hear the same noises, year after year. And they do say that it’s the men carrying poor Master Charles—him as was drowned six-and-thirty years ago—up to the bedroom where he slept the night before he was drowned.”

“And have you heard the noises?”

“I have, sir,” she said gravely. “And I heard them last night.”

“And did you ever—ever *see* anything?”

“No,” she said; “I have never seen anything; and I don’t think there is anything to be seen. And *you* didn’t see anything, sir?”

I thought it would be very absurd for me to spread about a new ghost story, so I told another tarradiddle—a pious one this time—and said I had seen nothing.

Then she told me the story.

A pretty little idyl with a tragical ending. A penniless ward, a fond mother, a handsome son, a country house. Put these simple elements into the kaleidoscope of Fortune and

shake them up. Shake them how you will, but one thing always comes—love. Either the boy loves the girl, or the girl loves the boy, or both love each other. Either the mother approves or she disapproves. The end is marriage, or it is separation and unhappiness. Our novelists are right in making their tales turn all upon love, because there is nothing else in life worth fighting for or having.

This time the story was very simple. The young man went soldiering for a few years, as all young men of birth and fortune should. He left at home his widowed mother and the girl, her ward, who lived with her—a sweet child of affectionate nature, who loved him like an elder brother. From time to time he got home on leave, the girl growing from childhood into maidenhood the while. Then his regiment went to India, he with it. The ladies lived at home, and occupied themselves with their poor, with their books, with such little society as the neighbourhood offered. Mostly they talked about their loved one in India.

The day came when the regiment came back again. Then Charles sold out and returned to his paternal acres, having had enough of military life. He came home handsomer than ever, and kinder to the mother whose prayers had followed him for so long.

He returned in June, when the summer was beginning. It was only a week after he came home that he made a discovery. You may guess what it was. He found out for the first time that Clara Swinford was not his sister, and he informed her that they had been having a great make-believe all these years, because he was not her brother.

She replied that she knew it very well—but that she always loved him like a brother.

He asked her how, having no brothers, she could pretend to understand what sisterly affection meant."

She said she guessed.

Then he began to ask her what kind of affection she had for him. Did she think a good deal about him?

She said, yes.

It appeared here, on close examination of the narrator,

that this duologue had been overheard by the narrator's father, the old serving-man whose apparition I had seen. He was so delighted to find that Master Charles and Miss Clara were coming to an understanding that he listened for more.

Did she further think about herself in connection with him? The question was difficult to answer, and required explanation. Did she, then, act, dress, and speak in some measure according to what she thought he would approve?

Then she blushed, and said she certainly did.

Did she ever think about his getting married to some other person?

She blushed again, and said she could not bear to think of it.

Then, her questioner went on, did she not see that sisters do not regard brothers in that way, and that she was nothing better than a little goose?

She laughed at this, and inquired why she was a little goose? Master Charles, in answer to this, took her in both his arms and whispered in her ears for two minutes. Then he kissed her on both cheeks and on the lips; then she tried to get away from him, but he held her hands and would not let her go till she kissed him in return. And then, while she cried and blushed and laughed, he kissed both her hands and she ran away.

This was in the garden.

The sole witness of this interview held his peace; but he was not surprised to hear a day or two afterwards, from Lady Alice, that Master Charles and Miss Clara were engaged.

The marriage was to take place in August.

Why go on with the pitiful story?

He was fond of fishing and sailing. He came to this inn, the nearest place where he could keep a boat and find a man to take care of it. Sometimes he slept in the place for a night when he was going out in the early morning.

It was a week before the wedding, that he came for the last time.

At four, when the day was breaking, he sailed out of the little port, he and his boatman.

They brought him back as I saw.

His mother went home and sat looking into space with a shattered mind and a broken heart for a few months. Then she died. Her religion was gone. How could Heaven kill so good a son, so good a man? Her hope was utterly gone. Even her sympathy was gone—for she could not feel for the bereavement of Clara Swinford.

So she died, and Clara Swinford was left alone. She never put off her black silk; she never laughed, and never smiled. Her face, which had been so rosy, so bright, so wreathed with smiles, so sunny with happiness, was set pale and grave. She was kind to every one, as she always had been; she was ready as ever to sympathise with every one's sorrow. But she lived alone. And, in solitude and sorrow, her life slowly wasted away. What a sad ending to a morning so bright and sunlit! In that dark street of tombs, where rest the young who should have lived to be old, where lie the early dead who by their death killed joy and brightness out of the lives of those who loved them, what more sorrowful tomb is there than the marble cross by the ruined abbey, beneath which lie the coffins of Charles and Clara?

MY OWN EXPERIENCE.

THE following experience occurred to me some years ago, when I was an undergraduate at Oxford. The college to which I belonged was of great antiquity and of the highest respectability. It had a creditable habit of turning out good men: it also enjoyed a considerable celebrity for good dinners, good whist, a geometrical bridge, a curious sun-dial, and an admirable collection of books.

There was one object in one of the upstairs rooms of the library that, from my earliest acquaintance with it, had fascinated me. And so great was its influence over me, that whenever I was in that room alone I could not hunt about from one dusty worm-eaten oak bookshelf to another for the volume I was in search of, but I must always go and set myself opposite that object.

An old case, five feet nine inches high, not counting the pedestal it stood upon; rather clumsily made, by some rough carpenter, of elm wood—a wood supposed in country-side lore to have peculiar preservative properties. The sides and back of this case were very much worm-eaten; it might be two hundred years old—it might be three. The front was closed by a door hanging on stout brass hinges, with a glass panel its whole length. This door enclosed a skeleton.

The skeleton—to speak by the card—of one who had been a woman.

In earlier days the college had boasted some celebrity in medicine, and had supplied the University with more than one Regius professor of physic. I had not the least doubt in my own mind, arguing from the known dates of our Regius professors teaching in the schools, and the apparent date of

the case and its unpleasant enclosure, that the bones were articulated at the cost either of the college or of one of these gentlemen for the purposes of illustrating anatomical lectures.

Tradition in the college, however, chose to assign a different origin to the deposit of the case in the library.

The generally-received story ran that, nobody knew how many years before, a murder had been done within the walls of the college, which had stirred the Oxford of the day to the marrow.

It was a crime of the foulest and most unnatural kind it is possible to conceive: the murder of an undergraduate by a bed-maker.

Now, if the undergraduate had put his bed-maker out of the way, an excuse might possibly have been proved for the act; but this was killing the goose that laid the golden eggs with a vengeance. Bed-makers as a race have grown wiser since the time of Mrs. Oyston, for the legend went so far as to assign the name of Oyston to the perpetrator of the deed. The name of the undergraduate is not mentioned in this history, neither was any adequate motive suggested for the crime, but a particular set of rooms was pointed out as having been the scene of the tragedy and it was added that the deed was done as he was sleeping in his chair one evening just as the supper bell was ringing nine.

The story was told to every freshman on his first appearance in that particular apartment of the library. There were of course many little variations in the narrative, but substantially the bare facts of the story were as I have stated them.

The library was opened for the purpose of taking out and returning books on two days in the week, and on these days our mediæval bed-maker's remains held quite a levée. Everybody who went into Dr. Smith's room, as the long gallery was called where the skeleton hung, opened the glass door of the case, and gave the wires from which the skull was suspended a playful shake. Impressionable young men made some allusion to the ghastly details of the tragedy; budding divines probably moralised on the uncertainty of life; the student of Shakespeare touched the worn skull, put his fingers to his nose, and said "Pah!" Medical students took the opportunity of displaying a little college learning.

Now, this sort of thing had been going on in term time, two days a week, for between sixty and ninety generations of undergraduates, and must have been perfectly intolerable to the skeleton, whose bones had fairly earned repose even if they had slaughtered a don.

I came to quite sympathise with the skeleton; and in the librarian I found a man of the same way of thinking as myself.

I must describe him. He was nicknamed the "Tame Elephant." His build was extraordinarily short, stout, and square; his muscular strength, as those who had seen him throw the hammer or put the weight knew, was enormous. But with this Atlas-like frame was found a very amiable and docile character. To this union of qualities he owed his *sobriquet*. His habits were unpleasant, for he did not love his tub, and was for ever changing his religion. He inclines to Buddhism now, I believe, after running the whole round of creeds. He was, at the time of which I am writing, a great walker, a great tippler of beer, and a very great smoker. If you were out for a walk, and a huge figure swung suddenly round a corner, book in hand, and nearly knocked you down; if you were startled by somebody bursting through a hedge, or fell over something lying reading in your path, it was always the Tame Elephant. If a light was burning at three in the morning in a room adjoining the library, it was the Elephant still at his studies. And his reading was of two sorts. He devoured fiction in English, in German, in French; his memory was prodigious, and he could spout forth pages of Scott or Goethe or Rabelais without a verbal mistake. But this was his recreation. His work was poring over the pages of every book on the Supernatural he could lay his large dirty hands on. His knowledge of the University books had obtained for him the post of librarian, to which a scholarship of some sixty or seventy pounds a year was attached.

A common purpose made us friends. He had determined to penetrate the mystery of the case in his charge. For Wottenham averred that at dead of night, as he lay in his bedroom, he could distinctly hear footsteps in the library adjoining.

Whose footsteps?

Presumably those of the ghost of the skeleton in the case.

We determined to discover for ourselves. It was November, and a wild night; the wind blew—as it usually does in the introduction to ghostly narratives—in frightful gusts. The *mise en scene* was perfectly appropriate. We were alone, I and the Elephant, in his sleeping-room. He had drunk his after-dinner draughts of beer and had smoked several pipes from a huge meerschaum, the bowl of which was fashioned into a death's head, with superimposed crossbones. We were in the oldest part of the oldest quadrangle of the college, where on the smoothly shaven grass plot ghosts might be expected to run about like rabbits under proper elementary conditions.

Our minds were duly prepared for manifestations by having previously—that is, between dinner and half-past eight o'clock—held an amateur *séance* in the Elephant's rooms, at which the manifestations had been remarkable. We are both firm believers in the supernatural. The key was in the door that communicated with the library, to which we were about to turn our steps, and we were impatiently waiting for the supper bell to ring nine.

"Two minutes," said Wottenham, pulling out his watch, and puffing the last and sweetest cloud from his pipe.

"Only two," I replied.

Two minutes of silence. The steps of the old porter crossing the quadrangle to the bell tower in the screens.

Tweak, tweak, tweak. Then the bell rang out loud and long, as it had rung out for several centuries at the same time, the only remnant now of a once, doubtless, substantial supper.

With the first sounds we rose and advanced to the librarian's door, as the oak planks that shut us out from Dr. Smith's room were called.

The key turned with difficulty, being seldom used.

Wottenham struggled with it; I followed and held a candle. His huge wrist and sinewy fingers soon turned the key in the wards; he put his foot against the door, and it opened with a bang. Rather, perhaps, with a dull, hollow, resonant boom; the sound the drop makes when it falls under a man's feet at Newgate. I, who am nervous and excitable, started at the unexpected noise.

Wottenham, whose nerves were iron, advanced with his usual rolling gait three or four paces into the dark room, through whose blindless, ivy-shaded windows only a faint glimmer from the quadrangle lamp penetrated on a dark night. Suddenly he turned round, quickly for him, and rather irritably snatched the candle from my hand. He flung it from him, sending it literally spinning into the room we had just left. The candle fell on his bed, the stick into his water-jug. I had time to reflect that the Elephant was not a person of nice tastes, and to wonder if, being athirst in the night, he would take a swig, as usual, from his jug—of water and tallow. “Better without a light!” he growled, *sotto voce*, in his stomach-bass.

“You’re not afraid?”

Gold would not in my then state of mind have tempted me a step further by myself. But I had for company a modern Atlas, and therefore managed to reply with some show of spirit—

“All that man dare.”

“All right; come on!” He turned round, and I could see the white of his face, and his not too clean shirt.

I supposed I lagged. We had half the length of the long gallery to walk; and our footfalls on the oaken planks sounded unearthly in the solitude and more than half darkness of Dr Smith’s library.

Wottenham, leaning towards me, and groping, said—

“Give me your hand,” and took my long thin fingers in his stout grasp.

There is great courage in a strong grip.

We advanced towards the case; and the only light from the quadrangle lamp fell full on it.

We were both looking at it, into it, through it, of course.

I seized his huge hand convulsively.

The wires were trembling, the bones shaking, the jaws grinning.

“We are shaking the old floor,” said the librarian coolly. “The bones rattle!”

“No—not—through—us!” I said in a whisper.

The bell had just ceased ringing.

“Wait!” said Wottenham.

"Hark!" we both said together.

The steps, beginning by the master's lodge, came nearer and nearer, louder and louder.

They were close to us.

The bones in the case danced a mad and unearthly dance in their prison.

Our eyes, accustomed to the light, saw clearly. And the steps—the ghostly footsteps—walked round and round the case—round and round us!

Believer as I was, and prepared to find myself face to face with the supernatural, I trembled in every limb.

"Spirit," said Wottenham, "you are here!"

We paused for a reply. None came; but the footfalls ceased. A low whistling noise more awful took their place.

"We will wait."

"If you can ease your condition by speaking—speak."

Dead silence.

Then the footfalls again round and round the case.

The skeleton preparing a terrible dance—Macabre.

"Can you make yourself intelligible?"

A knock which shook the dust from the elm wood.

"You can. If we wait you will speak?"

Another knock.

I had abandoned my grasp of Wottenham's hand. I held him tightly round his huge body, and stared with all my eyes at the vibrating bones, and listened with all my ears for what should come.

"Is your name Oyston?" asked Wottenham.

"Patience Clark," replied the Invisible.

"Is this your skeleton?"

"It is."

"You are condemned to walk this room at night on account of the crime that is connected with your name of Oyston?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Did you commit a murder?"

"No."

"Then there is no truth in the report?"

"Not a word. In the flesh I was as peaceable a woman as

ever lived, and the mother of eleven children, all alive when I left them."

"Why do you walk here?"

"For two hundred and forty years, good gentlemen, I have been waiting for the opportunity of speaking for myself and clearing my character. Now I shall not trouble the college, in which I hope I did my duty, again. I wish you good-night." The bones ceased to vibrate as she spoke. The steps, much softer this time, we heard running off in the direction of the master's lodge. They went through the thick wall, and have never been heard since.

Wottenham and I did our duty. We did our best to clear Patience Clark's character, but we never told the story of her interview with us, for the simple reason that unbelief was rampant in Oxford in our time.

So much of my own experience, as yet my only experience, of being in actual communication with the world of spirits.

The Elephant—who is now a country parson—and I have been bosom friends ever since. But this is the only supernatural tale we have to tell.

PART II.

From Fairyland.

TITANIA'S FAREWELL.

CHAPTER I.

“ Yes, it is beautiful—but is it true?
My friends, we know not, and it matters not :
That some find consolation in the thought
Shows that from some truth-bearing germ it grew.”

IT would, of course, be an absurd thing for me to expect to be believed when I recount the things that I saw and heard on the last Midsummer Night that the world has seen. It is an unbelieving age. We have become unbelieving through our morbid taste for fiction. We not only read so much, but we write so much, that the border-land between truth and imagination is all confused, the frontier-posts removed, the hedges of partition broken down ; so that we no longer know what to believe. And I, who come forward with my plain and unvarnished tale, trusting in nothing but its simplicity, no more expect or hope to meet with credence than if I were Mr. Anthony Trollope himself. This, if I were writing an article in the *Saturday*, would be a fruitful theme to enlarge upon. I could point out the injury done to simple unimaginative historians and narrators of dry fact, like myself. I could also descant upon the evils of a system which has made Fable Land so much like Really-and-Truly Land that we get nothing by going there. Why, bless my heart ! forty years ago we could get seers and dervishes in every keepsake ; spectres, of course ; ghouls, probably ; insatiable persecutors of virtue and innocence, certainly. Uncles came home from India and gave unexpected fortunes to nephews at the very nick of time ; wills were found in cupboards ; titles conferring

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the very loftiest rank descended accidentally on the most worthy. All manner of airy creations, gorgeous unrealities, wondrous and splendid fancies, glittering extravagances of imagination, abounded in the meadows of Fable Land, and made the whole country a Field of the Cloth of Gold. Now, all is changed. Its cities are as our cities—as ugly, and very nearly as dull. Its people are as ours. They talk exactly the same, and really quite as badly ; they dress the same, with a similar absence of good taste. And, in fact, one might just as well read a newspaper, advertisements and all, as one of the novels of real life from end to end. I know that by this preamble I may be laying myself open to a charge of attempting to gain credence for what follows. I am not, however, so anxious on this score, because my narrative is too plain and simple to invite criticism on the ground of truth. And, after all, what does it matter whether one is believed or not in these bad days ?

The odd thing is, that I should have remembered it all so well. The events recorded took rather more than three hours in all, with the songs and the dances. I allowed a few days to elapse, during which I was tormented with a feverish anxiety to write, before I began at all. When I at last commenced my task, I found the whole story, from beginning to end, drop into a regular, it is not for me to say an artistic, form, just as you see it here. I seemed to be writing at dictation. That, you will remark, is itself a proof of my credibility ; other proofs will be found on the last page. In as few words as possible, let me get rid of myself and go on with my story.

I was walking in the New Forest. Certain symptoms, with which I will not trouble the general reader, made me think that a week's quiet holiday would do me good. I am one of those who, when the mind is quite decided that a certain course of action is likely to do one good, always go and follow up that line. By this means I get a great deal more enjoyment out of the year than those laborious fellows who are content with their rush of a month in September. Last year, for in-

stance, I made a good six months clear this way. I went, then, to the New Forest, the scenery of which you may find described in the guide-books. I stayed in an old inn, just a single step above a village public, in a little market town. They told me that they were quiet on every day of the week except market-day. This was on the Friday. Accordingly, on the Friday, armed with a bagful of provisions and a flask, I started on a long and solitary ramble in the forest.

It is eight o'clock. The sun is low, and will set in a quarter of an hour. I come to the conclusion that I have actually and decidedly lost my road. I walk on in a purposeless way. Then I turn back, with the thought that, after all, the town must be in the other direction. Then backwards and forwards till I find myself once more by the old oak—so old that it may even have witnessed the death of the Red King. Twilight is on me, and it is ten o'clock. I sit down, and, opening my basket, finish the beef and bread that is left from dinner, take one more pull at the flask, and, lighting my pipe, lie down determined to make the best of a bad business and sleep under the oak.

I have been asleep. The night is as clear and bright as the day: so clear that the cock in some far-distant farmhouse—for his note is faint—keeps waking up, nervously thinking that it is day, and that he has overslept himself, till he is reassured by the sight of the moon. It is so clear, that if you had been sitting where I was, on one of the roots of the gnarled oak-tree, you would have seen, as I did, the shape of every leaf, a dark black place cut out of a deep blue sky. It is so clear and bright that every flower in the grass and on the bushes—cowslip and foxglove, honeysuckle and wild rose—can be distinctly seen, with its colours softened in the bright moonlight, which lies like a transparent veil of silver lace, sparkling like the sea, and covering flowers and grass, trees and bushes, hill and valley.

There is no sound in the air. Only, now and then, a faint breeze rustling amid the leaves; and then one, weaker than the rest, comes crashing and tumbling through the others to the ground. Or, now and then, a twitter from a topmost bough, where some bird is dreaming uneasily; and when the breeze

lamps ranged in festoons round the smooth greensward, which lay before me, a tiny lawn of level turf. Nothing could be seen ; but I heard a faint murmur as of continuous laughter, half-repressed, and a rustling among the leaves. Then a horn sounded, low and echoing, a clarion call ; and down a little lane, which led from somewhere in the outer darkness, I saw a procession slowly advancing in my own direction.

Now, here the wonderful part of the whole story begins. I rubbed my eyes to be quite sure that I was not dreaming. I beg to state that I distinctly remember rubbing my eyes.

The procession drew nearer. Music, but invisible, came with it. It was surrounded by glancing lights. Strange colours played upon the chariot which headed the long cavalcade. Strange forms, graceful and unearthly, uncouth and unearthly, hovered over it, and flew above it.

I had neither the wish to break silence, nor the fear of any harm for myself. Only curiosity and wonder possessed me ; for I knew then that I—the only man in this century, perhaps—was face to face with the Fairies ; that Masters Cobweb and Mustardseed were those who had bound me and closed my eyes ; that this was *Midsummer Night* ; that in the chariot before me stood *OBERON* and *TITANIA*, King and Queen of the ancient and wonderful Realm of Faerie.

I thought of all the stories I had read. Changelings—but I am much too old to be a changeling. Pinchings and prickings—that might happen for unbelief. Moon madness—well, there are some folks for whom any change in the condition of their brains would be a change for the better. Odd, too, how carnal things will creep in ; for I thought next that I should certainly catch rheumatism from lying on the grass. And in the midst of these anxieties a voice whispered in my ear—

“ Listen, be silent, and no harm will be done to you.”

I turned round. Beside me stood one whose face and form changed every moment ; but, by the light he bore, and by his antic gestures, I knew him at once for *JACK O' LANTERN*.

CHAPTER II.

“ When the lamp is shattered,
The light in the dust lies dead.”—SHELLEY.

ON a throne of silver, set with rubies and gems, and laid with velvet cushions the colour of the turf—the precious stones set like flowers, a canopy of green branches over its head—were seated King Oberon and Queen Titania. Then the music, which had ceased for a while, broke out again in a strange, mysterious melody, like a triumphal march. To prevent further questions, I may say at once that, though I remember everything else, I have entirely, thanks to an uncultivated ear, forgotten the music. I only know that it was now quick, now slow: rising sometimes to a wail of lament, and changing them to low notes of laughter and joy; now a dance and then a march—music that was never written in notes, and played on instruments unknown to man. It came from the outer ring, beyond the lamps, where all was dark.

I looked at the royal pair. Oberon stood erect: tall, pale, kingly. Over his clustered curls was placed his crown of diamonds. A purple mantle fell from his shoulders. He wore no sword, but carried in his hand a simple wand. His face was overcast and set with care. Titania was sitting beside him. Her long fair hair fell in a wealth of waves over her shoulders and beneath her diadem. Her eyes were turned upon her lord and king. Her face bore the reflection of his sorrow. Her hands were clasped.

Seated at her feet, smaller than any of the rest, was one with a child's face full of wisdom, a smile full of pity, a look as wayward as the breeze, as changing as the ocean. It was as if there were no memory of things past; as if she lived only in the present; as if she sorrowed with those who sorrow, and laughed with those who laugh. I knew her, by her wand and tiny crown, for Queen Mab.

In the air, now among the dancers on the sward, now before the throne—lightest, brightest, sweetest of spirits—was Ariel, the King's messenger.

On the ground beside the throne lay he who had just whispered me, Jack o' Lantern. They called him Puck. A mocking light was in his eye, laughter flickered on his lips. He shifted from one form to another; but one knew him always by his eye, unlike any of the rest.

The music played on; and on the turf the fairies danced in elfin glee, unmindful of the sorrow of their King. But when he spoke the music stopped, and they ceased their gambols. There must have been thousands of them, clad in weird and fanciful robes of various hue, with faces human—only of unearthly expression—and faces animal.

"Titania," said the King, "this is our last night of all. Our pleasant sports are finished: our gambols on the midnight sands, our frolics in the old halls, our dances on the greensward—all are finished. Way-wanderer will no more quake to see us glancing among the bushes; maidens will no more dream of us in terror and delight. We go! Simplicity and happy ignorance have left the land. We live by faith of man. Tell me, my children, if any faith remains. None?"—there was a dead silence—"None! Titania, it is time to be gone."

She fell, weeping, upon his shoulder. A low murmuring of sobs rose from the stilled ring of elves; and Puck, leading the rest, cried—

"We live by faith of men. They believe in us no more; therefore, we must go."

"Is this, then, the last night?" cried the Queen.

"It is, indeed, the last night," replied Oberon.

From every leaf and bush echoed a groan—

"The last night!—the last night!"

"But three short hours," the King went on—"but three short hours, and the kingdom of Faërie will be over in Merry England—merry, alas! no more. We have known and loved it so well: we have blessed so many mansions, dropped a charm over so many cottages, spread love and tenderness over so many homes, danced in so many woods, lived in so many haunts; and now we must go!"

"Alas! alas!" cried the goblin troop, "we must go—we must go!"

"There is no land like the land of the English—no forests like theirs, no lawns like their lawns. We love not the rank grass and the heavy-flowering trees of the tropics ; the crested palm is not like the leafy elm ; the scent of spices is not to us like the perfume of the wild thyme and the primrose. We love not the black man so well as the Saxon. Their children have been our playthings, their maidens our care ; their singers have been taught by us ; their children's games are ours ; their joys are our joys. And they forget us—they forget us !"

"Alas !" cried the sobbing Queen, "the ungrateful folk forget us. Let us go !"

And from all the weeping throng went up a cry—

"The folk forget us ! Let us go !"

"There was a time," Oberon continued, "when the village maiden found the butter churned by us, and the cow milked ready to her hand.

"I used to drink the milk !" sighed Puck.

"Then the ring on the grass showed our footprints ; then they told stories of us around the fire, and sang songs of us at night. All loved us, and delighted to tell of us, even the best and noblest. Now, all is changed. The song is no more of Robin Goodfellow and the Brownies ; they tell of the poor man's suffering, the rich man's luxury. The folk are more wealthy than they were, but they are not so contented. The new songs which the poets sing are of the earth, earthy. It is time that we go."

"It is time that we go !" they echoed.

"Come, my children," said the King ; "after all, there are other lands where we can find a home. There are sunlit islands of the Indian Ocean, fringed with a silver turf, where the palm-trees wave a welcome to us. I have seen them. There, the tree-fern spreads its leaves above us in a circle of glory. There, the moon is brighter than it is here and the air warmer. A thousand insects fly abroad, and a thousand gloriously coloured creatures creep through the forest. We may deck ourselves with the skin of the cobra and the scarlet feathers of the flamingo. My Titania shall wear the crest of the green parrot ; she shall take her fan from the breast of the

little Cardinal, and her feathers from the Bird of Paradise. Puck may mock the monkey in the tree, and Ariel shall float in an air far balmier and warmer than this. It is true, the turf is not so fine, and the grass is tall and rank; but the flowering creepers hang thicker than the whitethorn, binding tree to tree and forest to forest. Foxglove and violets there are none; but there are the white blossoms of the moon plant, and the scarlet flowers of the flamboyant. No winter there starves the lives out of God's creatures; no frost bites the poor man; no ice, and hail, and snow drive us to seek shelter in our own Fairyland; no driving sleet——"

"Yes," interrupted Mab; "and no cottage hearths, no gatherings in the winter evenings, no song by the red coals, no joyous welcome out of the cold and wet. Would that we might stay!"

"We lose our time," said the King, waving his hand impatiently, "in idle regrets. Dance, my children, as of old. Titania, think of old days. Remember how they danced for Bottom the weaver."

Titania smiled.

"It is a long while ago—long ago. They are all dead. Hippolyta henpecked Theseus, and Demetrius died of Lesbian wine. All dead and forgotten!"

"Nay, that night will ever live. What became of Hermia?"

"She lived tolerably happy with Lysander, till he was killed at the battle of Marathon. When Demetrius took to evil courses and pawned the furniture for drink, she often relieved Helena. Bottom lived on her bounty, too, when Hippolyta struck him off the pension list, and he lost his sixpence a day."

"True," said Oberon; "but it is long ago. Play, music; sing, singers."

Bright and beautiful, the elves sprang to their feet; and as they danced, in a wild, fantastic manner, they sang their chorus together, words keeping time with feet:—

"Strike, strike the strain the fairies love;
Awake the flowers that sleep above;
Till bluebell bends her face to see,
And roses greet our revelry;

Till violet turns her sleepy eye
To catch us as we hurry by ;
Till field-mice peep from every hole,
And, blinking, peers the purblind mole.
Awake the flowers that sleep above ;
Strike, strike the strain the fairies love ! ”

Then the King raised his hand ; and, in a moment, all was still.

It was Titania who broke the silence.

“ Is there, my liege, no place whither we can go ? Must we make the weary journey over the scorching sand and the stormy sea ? Is all Europe grown so clever as to doubt us ? ”

The King shook his head.

“ They have not passed an Education Bill everywhere,” murmured the Queen. “ Oh, surely, there are not School Boards in all Europe ! ”

“ Let us remember,” said Oberon, “ that we cannot go to the shores of the Mediterranean. The woods and streams of Italy and Greece are haunted by beings far different from ourselves—Bacchus and his noisy crew. You would not like to associate with him. Satyrs there are—monsters of most uncomely appearance, and their manners are detestable. Dryads there are in the woods, and Naiads by the fountains ; but you would not like them. They have nothing in common with us. They drowned the fair young Hylas. When did we drown fair youth ? They enchanted Narcissus. Then there are the Sirens. They lure brave warriors to destruction. Whom did we ever destroy ? They bring to shame and misery. Nay, Titania, thither we cannot go. We are Teutonic elves. We came from the black mountains and thick forests of Germany to the upland lawns and merry valleys of England.”

“ Can we not go back there ? ”

“ It must not be,” said the King. “ Germany is no more. It is all Prussia. We love not iron heels and martial despotism. We love the lands of liberty. Yet it is the old country. It is the land of our birth. Long have I pondered whether, after all, we might not return.”

“ There have been many,” the Queen pleaded, “ who have loved us as well as our own Shakespeare and Hood. There it

was we passed our marriage moon. Some honour should surely await us in the land of Wieland and Tieck."

"I thought of all this, fair one; and, unknown to you, I have been there lately. It is no land for us. True it is that the wild restlessness which runs riot here is there but little known; yet the phantasy by which we live neglected, is long since forgotten—for the greatest minds have never known us at all. Their woods are mostly peopled with ghosts and goblins; witches meet on their mountain-tops; giant spectres stalk about the hills. Nothing lovely, nothing pleasant; and, to fill up all, clumsy plaster casts of the Fauns of Latin hills."

He stopped and laughed.

"I must tell you what I saw. Say then if we may ever go back to the German land. There is a little University town, from which learned men have come in plenty. One of them, still living, I found sitting in his study, translating the 'Midsummer Night's Dream.'"

"It was a laudable and a noble thing to do," said the Queen; while all the fairies applauded.

"It was. And he was writing a commentary all the while upon it. He sat at his task from five in the morning, when he rose, till eleven at night, when he went to bed. He never had a tub. His windows were always closed, and his fire lit. He smoked a vast pipe all day, while his servant brought him from time to time a cup of coffee. I sat upon his shoulder, unknown and unseen, and sought to kindle in his sluggish brain some sparks of inspiration, blowing the smoke of his pipe into a thousand suggestive and fantastic shapes. But he wrote on, and never looked up. I looked into his brain: it was crammed with knowledge, but muddled with conceit, vanity, and ignorance of men and the world. Then I began to get angry. Looking over his shoulder, I read what he was writing. He said—

"It cannot be too distinctly borne in mind that the inwardness of this poet's genius, and the noblest portions of his considerable creative faculties, are mainly German, in their tendencies towards the embodiment of the Ideal; while very many of his productions, with more or less distinctness, not

only in their generalisations of the unique, but equally—if not, perhaps, rather—sometimes in a still greater measure, in the analogisation of that consecutiveness which is evolved from the development of the interpenetrative conjunction of his ratio-cinative idiosyncrasies, which in their turn depend——’”

Here the King stopped, and looked around him. A profound slumber had fallen upon everybody present. Titania's head drooped before her hand; Mab lay curled round, her eyes closed in sleep; Puck was in a heap upon the ground; and Ariel lay motionless on a bough. Every fairy was stretched in deep, measureless unconsciousness.

The King smiled. He first awakened Titania, and then Puck. The Queen implored pardon.

“My Titania,” said the King, “I did exactly the same thing myself when I first read the passage. Wake the troop, good Puck.”

They were roused from their slumbers with some difficulty.

“Now,” continued the King, “try not to sleep again. I will leave out a large portion.”

He went on:—

“‘The ingrained coarseness of the English mind has, from time to time, sprung backwards into most lamentable forms of grossest superstition.’ (Mab, my child, you are nodding.) ‘Thus, the same nation which habitually shuts up its wives in madhouses, when it cannot sell them in Smithfield for a glass of porter-beer-ale and a steak, also believes’—(Listen, now, children! Puck, wake up the sleepers!)—‘also believes that the brown circular patches, edged with bright green, seen in woods and fields, are caused by the fairies, and not, as has been shown by the illustrious Doctor Glaubenstodt, in his classical, ever-to-be-gratefully remembered and admired “Microscopical Investigations,” to be the growth of a fungus, named the——’”

Here the voice of the King was interrupted by such an indignant clamour of wrath, that he was fain to pause awhile.

“Enough!” he said—“enough! We cannot live in a land whose poets write such notes as these. The great and glorious

German country shall know us no more till their early faith return to them."

"And that will be—when, O King?" was the cry.

"I know not. They must learn to love liberty more than military glory. They must learn mercy for the conquered, pity for the helpless. They must first be chivalrous, before they can be simple. For in these things men work backwards. I know not. We fairies have not the gift of prophecy. We can remember the past, we can feel the present. We cannot reason—we cannot foretell. Enough of gloom! Let not our last night be passed in idle laments. Play, music—dance, elves—sing, Ariel!"

Again the wondrous strain of weird and magic music, again the dances in the ring. All clouds vanished from their noble features; and to the sound of the silver clarion, the ripple of the silver laughter, the tinkle of the thousand feet, Ariel's voice rose and fell, as he sang the Summer Song:—

"See, the sun doth early rise;
 See, the woods throw deeper shade;
 Lifts the world her thousand eyes,
 Sing the birds in copse and glade.
 Wakes again the throstle's note;
 Cracks again the blackbird's throat;
 Murmurous hummings lightly float
 On the south wind air.
 In the season none, I wot,
 Half so blithe and fair.

"Now the lilies, lying o'er
 Lazy waters, spread their leaves;
 Now the martins, back once more,
 Cling beneath the farmstead eaves:
 Now the roses flaunt their red;
 Now the sunflower turns his head:
 Springing from their grassy bed,
 Now the cowslips perfume shed.
 Spring is dying, winter dead,
 All the world seems glad;
 Joy, of light and sunshine bred,
 Brightens faces sad.

"Now the children leap and run,
 Over lawn and under bough;

Laugh, for summer is begun—
 Seasons none so glad as now.
 Only age, weighed down with cares,
 Looks abroad, and sighs his fears,
 Draws his long cap o'er his ears ;
 Rheum and cough e'en south wind bears.
 Not so, years gone by :
 Fain would weep, but finds no tears,
 Old age is so dry.

“ Age, be sad, 'tis fit thou should ;
 Sun is sunk, day spent for thee.
 Children, dance through mead and wood,
 Know no change of life and glee.
 Manhood, rouse, thine is the day—
 Dreaming youth hath passed away.
 Turn the waving grass to hay ;
 Look the crop do not decay.
 August too soon follows May—
 Autumn gathers all.
 Then comes Winter, grim and grey ;
 Then the shadows fall.”

CHAPTER III.

“ ‘ Dear lord, it hath a fiendish look,’
 The pilot made reply.”—COLERIDGE.

“ COME, we will hold our court,” said the King. “ Fly, my Ariel, east and west, north and south, proclaim that we are departing. Summon those friends before us who would bid us farewell.”

A long, low wail, at which the blood ran cold, rang through the trees. The elves shrieked with affright, and fled for shelter to the bushes ; the lights burned pale. Then a shape, as of a sheeted woman, wan, pale, thin, with long black tresses and wild eyes, slowly moved into the ring. A cold, shrieking wind came with it.

“ Who are you ? ” asked the King. “ In the name of human credulity, who are you, and who invited you ? ”

The lips parted.

“ I am the Banshee,” it said, with a grating, strident voice.
 “ I am going with you ; for men believe in me no more.”

"You go?" cried Titania. "You—the creation of a dreary superstition, the forerunner of sorrow, the foreteller of death, the nurse of pride! You!—and with us, the joy-bringers? Oberon, chastise this fond and foolish spirit."

Oberon laughed.

"Let us not trouble this our last night's meeting. Sufficient to bid this thing depart, and that right instantly."

"Oh!" it cried, "let me go with you. My own place knows me no more. Night after night have I shrieked on plain and hill, and men say it is the wind. Let me go too!"

"Can you dance?" asked Puck.

It shook its head.

"Can you sing?"

"No. I can only shriek. You may make men merry. I belong to death and separation. I can shriek for your departure. Listen!"

It shrieked—a long cry as of some woman to whom the news has too suddenly been brought of her son's violent death—a cry of unutterable despair and misery, the cry of a breaking heart. The woods, awakened by the awful sound, sent forth a thousand wails in reply from the awakened birds. The owls flew across, with mournful hooting; the bats thronged together to see the cause of all this tumult; fathers of the young broods left their nests and flew to the spot, but hastened back in horror; and the elves fell to the earth in terror, crying out in agony—

"Let it go—let it go; but not with us."

"Go," said Oberon, who alone preserved his equanimity—"go: but not with us."

Stealthily as it came, it crept away; and presently the fairies recovered from their alarm, and looked up again.

When it was gone, the music began to play again, and the elves to come forth from their hiding-places. Then was heard a sort of humming—a sound as of underground horns and drums—and every one stood hushed and expectant. Next, from the roots of the oak, close by the throne, the sounds drew nearer and nearer. And then the players themselves appeared—a band of little black men, in colour like the black metal

instruments on which they played, which were of iron—iron drums, iron trumpets, iron flutes. After them followed a little army, like themselves—short, square, with big heads—carrying spades and picks. Last of all, one taller than the rest, who wore an iron crown set with black gems, clothed in a deep purple robe, carrying in his hand a sceptre of the reddest gold. At sight of them the fairies leaped for joy, and, rushing from their hiding places, danced round their cousins, the little Earthmen. The Queen smiled a welcome; and Oberon, stepping with majestic air from the throne, embraced his royal brother.

"Welcome," he said, "from the mines. It is long since we have seen the King of the Gnomes."

"Welcome," returned the dusky King, whose name I did not hear—"welcome, King Oberon. It is not our fault that we meet so seldom. Only, hearing that this night you hold revelry for the last time, we have come to bid you farewell; or to go with you, if so it may be."

"Go with us! But why not stay?"

"Well, you see, it seems no good. From end to end of England there is not a soul who believes in us. It is hard to be always at work down below, and to meet with no appreciation of one's labours. We don't want riches. We work at the mines for men: we put the ore in readiness for the miners. But we work in vain. No thanks, no acknowledgment; no hint that our services are recognised. Even a little fear of us would be something. But no, no—they don't care a blacksmith's dump for us."

"Do they not even fear you?"

"Bless you, they never think of us. And after all we have done for the English people—staving off fire-damp, making earth soft, even altering the lay of the strata; and all for nothing. Wait till coals get scarcer. Geology takes everything to its own credit."

"Our case quite," said Oberon gloomily. "Natural philosophy pretends to account for everything."

"And what will you do for us, if we let you go?" asked Titania.

"The thing is, what we cannot do," said the Gnome King.

"We know where to find diamonds for you, rubies, and sapphires—gems brighter than any in Queen Victoria's Crown. We can find the red gold, and hammer it into cups, and sceptres, and fairy work. Besides, we can laugh, and sing, and dance. You should only hear us laugh. Laugh, my merry men all!"

With great gravity, the Earthmen laid down their spades; and laying hold of each other, as if for fear that they might fall down through sheer excess of hilarity, every man by his neighbour's shoulder, they burst forth into a cachination so unanimous, so loud, so infectious, that Queen Titania laughed till her eyes ran over, and Oberon and the Gnome King supported each other in convulsions of merriment, and the elves rolled over and over, screaming with delight. And just as suddenly as they had begun the Earthmen ended, picking up their spades and standing to order with faces of supernatural gravity.

"That used to please the miners in days gone by," said their King. "Listen, now, while we sing."

Then they sang, beating time with their spades—

"When the fires are bright and glowing,
When the quickened metal's flowing,
When the perfect mould is ready,
When the brawny arms are steady,
Waiting for the work—
Think then, think of our labours,
Think of us, your unseen neighbours;
How by night and day we guide you,
How beneath, above, beside you,
Busy Earthmen lurk."

"And they won't think of us," said the Gnome King, "devil a bit—I beg her Majesty's pardon, the language of miners is sometimes strong—but they won't think of us. Dance, my merry men all."

They laid down their spades again, and began to dance with exceeding solemnity, while their metallic band played. Presently, Puck began to caper solemnly in imitation; and all the rest, following his example, danced behind the Earthmen, copying their movements.

"Thank you, cousins of the earth," said Oberon; "you shall come with us. We are going to a hotter climate than this; but you are doubtless used to a still warmer temperature. Bring your great coats with you for fear of catching cold."

They took up their places in the outer ring, and sat down patiently, saying—

"We will go with our friends the fairies."

A rustling of the bushes! A strange form—vast, uncouth, unwieldy, of no shape to speak of, and features which might have been fashioned by a child out of a piece of dough. It had a sort of wild, ridiculous terror in its fishy eyes, as it flopped on its big knees before the throne, and held up two great white hands.

"Let ME go, too!" it cried—"please, let ME go, too!"

"Pray, who are you, first?" said Oberon. "We know you not, uncourteous stranger."

"I know him," said Puck—"I know him, King. This is none other than Hobgoblin. He is Bogey. He it is who frightens little children in the dark, and makes them afraid to go upstairs to bed."

"Is that true?" asked the King sternly.

The Hobgoblin looked up hesitatingly. There was little encouragement in the King's eyes.

"I am," he said. "It is true. I am Hobgoblin—Bogey—Old Bogey. But I only frighten children; grown-up people were never afraid of me; and now the very children are beginning to laugh at me."

"And you," exclaimed Titania—"you whose whole delight and business it is to frighten the children that we love!—you, to dare!—O Oberon! chase this creature from our presence."

"No one believes in me," whined Hobgoblin, great tears rolling down his cheeks. "I get under the beds and in the cupboards; I lie in corners on staircases; I lurk in dark passages; and from John o' Groat's to Penzance there is not a nurse who does not laugh at me—hardly a child left afraid to sing all about a dark house. If you do not let me go with

you, I shall have to go and live in a churchyard. Oh! bohoo! bohoo!—and I so afraid of ghosts!”

But he leaped up with a shriek, for a hundred fairies were pricking him with pins and darts, and scurried off into the outer darkness.

“I would follow thy fortunes, great King of Faerie.”

The voice came from the hollow tree; and, looking round, I saw its owner, a comical little old man with a hump on his back. His legs were bandy, his feet too big for his body; in his hands a basketful of toys and children’s fancies. They looked at him with surprise.

“Is it possible,” he said, “that his Majesty does not know me? I am Saint Nicholas. I creep down the chimneys on New Year’s Eve and Christmas Eve. I fill the children’s baskets with Christmas and New Year gifts. They go to sleep expecting me; and when morning breaks, they find I have been by their bedside in the night. They all love me, the good Saint Nicholas. I would fain go with you.”

“Stay,” interposed Puck, with a lawyer-like air, “stay, my lord and king. Is there precedent for this? Can we have a saint among us? Have any of us ever been saints? Will he not spoil our innocent sports?”

“Nay, nay, friend Puck, I have never been canonised by the Church. Saint, Christian name—I mean first name; Nicholas, surname: no saint at all. Oh dear, no.”

“Leave me to deal with him,” said Puck. “Why dost wish to go with us, worshipful sir saint?”

“Because no one believes in me,” said Nicholas, sighing.

“Nonsense, nonsense! most wooden-headed of saints. Pray, what time of the year is this? Is it not midsummer Eve? Did not the children believe in thee last Christmas?”

“Surely, friend Puck.”

“Then, friend Nicholas, pack up thy traps and begone, and get thee to sleep and thankfulness. Surely, to be believed in once in the year is enough in these hard times. Good night, and interrupt us no more.”

“Nay,” said Titania, “let us part friends, for we meet no more. Go on, good Saint Nicholas, and please the children,

though they forget us. We love all those who love children Farewell."

Then passed a crowd of dim and shadowy forms across the turf. One spoke. It was a voice as from the dead, bodiless and thin.

"We, O fairies, are the shades of shadows long since departed. We are forgotten and dead. But we come to bid you farewell."

"Who are you, then?"

"I," said one, "am the Wraith of Second Sight. I come from Scottish soil. I perished at Culloden. I——"

"Call the next," said the King.

"I am Cutty Sark," said the shade of a young and comely woman, stepping forward with a bold and assured air.

"And it was you," cried Puck, "who caught Tam O'Shanter's mare by the tail. Dear me! would I had been there to see! It is a merry tale. Have they forgotten you, dear Miss Cutty Sark?"

"They will not readily forget me," she said proudly; "but no one fears now to wander on the heath after dark. It is high time I disappeared altogether. I suppose it is no use asking permission to go with you?"

"Not the slightest in the world," said Titania coldly. "Your name alone—oh, it is absurd! Go with respectable people, indeed!"

"I," said another, dressed in armour, with a chivalrous mien—"I am Guy, Earl of Warwick. Here is my dun cow that I killed. Here, too, is the Dragon of Wantley. I go to Avilion, to meet Arthur. We shall come back together some time, according to Merlin's prophecy. His Majesty King Arthur would have been here to-day himself, but one of the Guineveres is suffering from the toothache."

"He! he! he!" tittered a tottering old man, coming to the front. "It is all rubbish and delusion. I *am* Merlin myself. Very sorry to have been the cause of any misunderstanding on your part, Sir Guy; but there really is not the slightest chance of Arthur ever coming back again. Dead as

a door-nail he is ! So are you, bless your heart ! and so am I, but not forgotten—oh no, not forgotten ! Pray, gracious company, accept the farewells of a poor old prophet, who does not see so clearly as he did what is going to happen. Nevertheless, if I may be permitted to quote myself, I may remind you of a prophecy which I made a long time ago. Singularly enough, it has never yet been fulfilled :—

“ When the Thames runs red ;
 When the Severn leaves its bed ;
 When the whitebait grow to whales
 In the Crystal Palace pails ;
 When, despite the penal laws,
 Every claimant wins his cause ;
 When a British public begs
 For a ballet without legs ;
 When the French get back their clocks ;
 When a bald man gets new locks ;
 When all things that can't be, come,
 Think of Merlin's Fo-Fi-Fum.”

“He drivels, this old dotard,” said another knight. “Go back to your Vivien, Merlin. King of the Fairies, we were once the Seven Champions of Christendom. I am St. George of Merry England. This is my friend, St. Denis of France. Put on your head, man !”—it was under his arm, smiling uncannily. “This is St. Andrew. Here is St. Patrick”—the Irish knight appeared to be in liquor. “The rest of us, I am sorry to say, are absent, being engaged in a desperate enterprise for the Princess Belle-Belle, of Mongolia, whose giants they are endeavouring to kill. Mongolia, as Mr. Keith Johnston will inform you——”

“Know him intimately,” murmured Puck, wagging his head.

“Is an island in the Pacific Ocean, not far from Greece ; otherwise, I am sure they would have been happy to be present. It is, however, a melancholy occasion.”

“And are you really forgotten, gallant gentlemen ?” asked Titania.

“Clane,” said St. Patrick. “If it was not for Donnybrook Fair, Oi'd lave me ungrateful counthry !”

“It's little thocht of we are noo,” said St. Andrew. “I live at Aberdeen myself, under the disguise of a Free Kirk

meenister. Come, Sir King, and see me; and if the finest whusky——”

“Nay, nay,” said St. George, a fine and courtly gentleman of middle age, not unlike the Duke of Cambridge; “we will not intrude our sorrows on the King. We wish your Majesties farewell.”

He bowed and turned away. St. Patrick shed tears of genuine emotion; and St. Denis, who replaced his head under his arm, went away sighing profoundly. The long train vanished with them.

Another form stepped forward, brisk and impudent.

“I’m Number Nip,” he said, with a look round.

“Lord bless my soul!” cried Puck—“I mean my body and bones and wings; these mortals corrupt one—come to my manly breast, my cousin. Don’t you remember me, your cousin Puck, Robin Goodfellow, Will o’ the Wisp, Jack o’ Lantern?”

Number Nip burst into tears, and they fell into each other’s arms.

“We used, years ago, to pinch the slatternly maids, and trip up the drunken men. Oh! the fond recollections of the days gone by!”

A melancholy procession of sad-faced men, decked out with feathers, and carrying bows and arrows, passed into the ring.

“We are the shades of Red Indian legends,” said the leader. “I am Leaping Water. These are Elkfoot, Hawk-eye, Whispering Wind——”

“Pooh!” said the Queen; “there never was anybody like you in the Indies, I know.”

They explained that it was America they had come from.

“Where is America?” asked the Queen of Puck.

He reflected, with an air of wisdom.

“You go,” he said, “to Athens. From Athens you may travel to the snows of Caucasus, if you like; but it is a long journey, and dangerous on account of the robbers and the jinns. You had better think twice before going. Thence to Devonshire; whence you may easily discern the peaks of the American hills. There be elephants and great bears.”

"Well, I don't know you," said the Queen; "but it is kindly meant, and we wish you farewell."

They disappeared. Then a sound of senile laughter, and a hurrying through the air; and, arriving all at the same moment, there sat at the King's feet half a dozen old women on broomsticks.

"Goodness gracious!" said Titania, "I thought you were all gone long ago—done away with, and vanished."

"So we were, my dearie," said the oldest and ugliest; "and now we are coming to see you go. Ho! ho!—it was time. They burned us. What will they do with you?"

"Do not be alarmed, my Queen," said Oberon—for Titania recoiled in terror—"they are but shadows. I will frighten them away."

He turned to the witches, and spoke—

"You poor old women," he said, "go back to your—to where you come from. Have you not found out by this time that you cannot impose upon us? Do you think that, when everybody believed in you but us, we shall believe in you when everybody else does not? Go hence, poor old creatures."

"He does not believe in us!" cried the astonished hags. "Eye of toad and leg of newt—King Oberon does not believe in us! Brain of bat and blindworm's foot—and Puck dares to laugh at us! Toe of frog and mandrake's root—and Titania shakes her head at us! Adder's tongue and drowned man's boot! Ah! if it were only the merry days of old—where the screech-owl loves to hoot——"

"Fly—vanish!" cried Oberon. "Play up, music!"

At the first sound of the pipes, the witches mounted their broomsticks, and scurried, shrieking, into the upper air.

There rolled to the King's feet a round earthenware flask, tightly stopped and sealed.

The King cautiously picked it up, and, after examining its outward appearance, shook it at his ear.

"There is no sound," he said. "It may be Malvoisie or Sherris sack, or even good Bordeaux. But the seal is strange. Will my royal brother lend me a corkscrew? Puck, proceed to open it."

Puck took it cautiously, and applied the corkscrew—Oberon drawing his sword and standing on the defensive, for he suspected magic.

When the cork was drawn, a thin, light pillar of smoke came out. This mounted higher and higher, assuming the proportions and appearance of a vast giant, higher than the top-most tree scowling and angry. In his hand he held a club.

"Who are you, great sir?" shouted the King.

"Who are you, little pigmies?" he returned.

"We are fairies."

"Don't know you. Where am I?"

"You are in England."

"Don't know where England is. Where's that fisherman? Gr—r—r!—if I could catch that fisherman! I am a Genie from the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"My liege," said Titania, "I am afraid of him. Tell him to go."

"Sir Genie," said the King, "we are celebrating our last night. We go to the East shortly."

"I will go too; perhaps I shall find that fisherman."

"Perhaps you will," said Puck. "As it was only two thousand years ago, you are very likely indeed to find him still living in his happy home, at his old trade. Meantime, sir, let me remark that your size is extremely inconvenient. At present none of us can see the moon."

"You don't want to see the moon. What good can the moon do you, I should like to know? Don't talk rubbish. Stay, you shall take me with you in the accursed bottle. Is it broken? No."

Puck held the bottle, while the vast mass slowly compressed itself, and went back whence it came.

"You will uncork me," said the Genie, "when you get there. If you don't, I'll—I'll——"

"Oh, sir!" said Puck solemnly—"as if we should disobey so great a lord."

The last breath of smoke entered the bottle. In a moment Puck had the cork in and the sealing-wax down.

"He must have been a foolish creature, this savage Genie,"

said Oberon, laughing. "We will throw the flask into the sea."

A group of shadows, so dim that for a while it was hard to make them out. But I knew them.

"Who are ye, courteous sirs and ladies?"

"We come, King of Men—I mean of Fairies," said one of them, whom I recognised as Pallas Athênê, "we come from Smith's Classical Dictionary. We are the gods and goddesses of Greek Mythology."

"You don't look quite as you used to in Shakespeare's time," said Ariel, gazing curiously at them.

"No? He must have read Lemprière," said Pallas, smiling.

"Perhaps," said Ariel.

"Oh, of course," said Puck, nodding his illiterate head—"of course he read Lemprière. I remember, indeed, that he did. Pray, who is this gentleman?"

"I am Zeus, the Cloud Compeller," said the majestic shade—"that is, I was. Alas! I am no more. This is my bride, Hêrê the Ox-eyed. We had youth and strength; but, you see, there was unfortunately something wrong—a mistake of some kind—about the promised immortality. Olympus is now but a barren rock; otherwise we should have been glad to invite you to dine at our royal banquets. Times are entirely changed. The philosophers made light of us: the Romans altered us. They took away my character, and told scandalous stories; but, of course, Titania does not believe the things that have been said about me."

Titania had never heard any of the stories, and said so.

Hêrê laughed incredulously.

"This," continued Zeus, "is my child, Aphroditê. She is said to be beautiful. Pardon the partiality of a—a—according to some—a parent."

Aphroditê stepped forward, smiling. Around her steps sprang new and beautiful flowers. The music lifted in soft and joyous strains. Every eye brightened. Ariel fell at her feet, kissing them, and crying out in passionate admiration of her beauty. Puck lay grovelling. Oberon's eyes grew softer.

There was a feeling as if sorrow was dead, and nothing possible evermore but the sweetness of love and passion.

"You see," said Aphroditê with a smile, "things change and pass away. But I never die."

"Foolish creature!" said Pallas. "It is love that never dies—love that yearns for its mate. You are but the ideal woman—the loveliest form that poet's eye has ever seen. You, like all of us, are passed away and gone. I, too, am gone. But wisdom lives."

"And I," said Zeus. "But a fuller reign has followed mine."

"And I," said Arês. "But men fight still, and valour always lives. We are all gone away and departed."

Aphroditê tore the cestus from her waist, and, bursting into tears, vanished in the darkness.

Pallas picked up the glittering thing.

"She will ask for it again, by and by," she said. "Farewell, kindly people. You were not so wise, nor so profound, nor were you so gloriously sung as we. Nor had you any symbolism in your existence, as we, who represented so many things. Still, you were always good and kind. Once more, farewell!"

Little Eros, running into the Fairy Queen's arms, sobbed out—

"Farewell, farewell! I have ever loved you. I love all folk who are kind to Love."

So they vanished; and for a moment all was still.

Then followed a rude clashing of weapons and blare of trumpets resounding through the forest.

"Who is there?" asked the King. "Go see, my Ariel." He went, and instantly returned.

"My liege, a deputation from the Siege of Troy. The Greeks and Trojans have unfortunately quarrelled on the way; and Troilus has been fighting with Ulysses. But Ulysses has run away, and I have dismissed the unmannerly churls."

"'Tis well. We receive no more. Play, music. Sing another chorus."

"Oh, who—oh, who are so happy as we,
On the wild wood's grassy ground?
As the wayward wind in the heavens free,
And bright as the flowers around.

“ Though lighter than falling leaf of the rose
 Our step on the young spring grass ;
 By the ring that we leave, the wayfarer knows
 When Titania's revels pass.

“ We shun the winter, we shun the day,
 But ours is the night of June :
 When the first bird twitters upon the spray
 We vanish away with the moon.

“ We love the eve, and we love the night,
 We come when the day hath fled :
 But the morning star is our sign of flight,
 And we part when the East grows red.”

CHAPTER IV.

“ These were the pranks she played among the cities
 Of mortal men ; and what she did to sprites
 And gods, entangling them in her sweet ditties,
 To do her will and show their subtle slights,
 I will declare another time.”—SHELLEY.

OBERON turned to the King of Gnomes, and said, “ Fair King, we will show you and your men some scenes of our life in England.” He waved his wand, and instantly all disappeared, except the King and Queen and the Earthmen. The lights died out, and a black darkness lay before the throne.

Gradually a faintly luminous cloud was visible. Then this grew brighter. As the light became stronger, the music played louder. A series of prismatic coloured clouds rolled away, like some successive curtains at a theatre—red giving way to orange, this to yellow, yellow to green, green to brown, brown to indigo, and this to violet. Lastly, all rolled together, and a white light fell upon everything.

It was a subterranean hall that I looked upon, decorated with plashing fountain and countless jets of light, supported by lofty columns ; within, the fairies dancing and singing. The music suddenly ceased. Presently was heard the sound of a single flute, playing “ The Girl I left behind me.” The fairies stopped and listened. The piper drew nearer ; and presently a face—a man's face, ugly, hairy, surprised—

appeared at the end of the hall. Instantly the columns fell, the lights went out, and where had been a hall was a blank and barren heath, and a ragged piper, scratching his head, and looking round and round; while the moon shone through the driving clouds, and the wind whistled among the rags that covered the man.

"Faith, now," he murmured, "that's an odd thing! Where's the fairies, bedad?"

He walked about the moor, tapping the ground, to find if there was any hollow place by which the great hall might be approached again.

"Was I standing now, or was I lying on the ground? Was it subterraneous entirely, or was it high above the airth? It's bothered I am!"

He went on his way, but the fairies drew him by invisible cords, so that he wandered from marsh to marsh, falling into the bogs, pricking himself with briars, and helplessly adrift. In the morning, they brought him back to the place where he started the night before. The colleen came running out to meet him.

"Arrah! then, and sure it's Tim the Piper come back again."

"It is that same," he said. "Lord be betwuxt us and harm. I'm clane done with the good people."

The clouds fell again.

"One of our common stories," said Oberon. "Everybody knows it. Now we will show you others not so well known."

This time, a garden in front of a noble house. A river rolled its waters at the foot of the lawn. Beyond the house, a wood; beyond the wood, blue hills. A soft-hued sun over all. On the lawn, a party of four—an old gentleman with his daughter, and two young men dressed in the fashion of King Charles the Second's time. Fair was the girl, as only English girls are fair; proud and stately her father; proud, if not stately, the two young men, in whose faces dissipation and excess had already laid their mark. One of them bore a guitar, which, as he lay on the grass, he touched with careless hand.

"Sing to us, Sir Vyvyan," said the girl.

"Nay—I did but bring the guitar in the hope that its mistress would herself sing to us."

“Alas! what has a country girl to sing? I know but two or three ditties—‘Come Lasses and Lads,’ and ‘The Bailiff’s Daughter,’ and such.”

“The country ditties please thy father, lass,” said the old gentleman; “but doubtless they have a rustic flavour. We are only simple shepherds in this secluded place, Sir Vyvyan. Sing us ‘When the King shall enjoy his own again.’ ’Tis a good song, child.”

"A good song," said the other cavalier, "but a thought old-fashioned. Besides, his Majesty, God bless him——"

"Amen!" said all, taking off their hats.

"His Majesty has got his own again by this time, and knows how to enjoy his own in royal fashion; and the pestilent Roundheads know better than to show their crops and faces."

"If they did," said the girl, "Sir Vyvyan would chop them all to pieces."

"Girl, girl!"

“Nay, father, I did but jest; and you know my heart is in the right place. But Sir Vyvyan looked so fierce. But sing us a court song, Sir Vyvyan, one of those things that they are so fond of in London.”

Sir Vyvyan laughed, and taking the guitar—it was in tune—began—

“ Flower fair, oh ! tell me where
Hues like thine, if thou mayst speak,
Borrowed were ?

‘Whence should they, sir?
I took mine from Cynthia’s cheek.’

“ Waves that smile round bay and isle,
Why do ye so blithely trip ?
‘ Because to-day she came this way,
We caught the smile on Cynthia’s lip.’

“ Birds sing now on every bough,
Why is this day's song so glad?
' It is the note your Cynthia taught,
Thus sings she by wood and mead.' ”

“ Whispering trees, that in the breeze
Sigh a murmur soft and sweet,
What is't you say ?

‘ We heard to-day
Cynthia fair her love repeat.’

“ Little stream with waves that seem
Dancing down in boundless glee,
Tell me why ?

‘ Ah ! she came by ;
We caught the laugh she meant for thee.’

“ Sweet west wind : thou, to my mind,
Laden with all perfumes art,
Whence thy breath ?

‘ 'Tis from the wreath
Thy Cynthia wears upon her heart.’

“ Whispering trees and perfumed breeze,
Laughing stream and smiling sea,
Birds that sing, and everything,
Go bid my Cynthia come to me !”

“ Truly,” said the old man, “ a gay and gallant song. Tell me it is not some French ware, but good sound English workmanship.”

“ Thank you, Sir Vyvyan,” said the girl. “ It is doubtless one of Mr. Herrick’s.”

“ I am flattered, Lady Catherine. It is not Herrick’s, but my own. Good sound English workmanship, my lord, if I am an Englishman.”

“ Indeed,” said the young lady, who seemed bent on not liking anything that Sir Vyvyan said or did. “ Sir Vyvyan is a knight of very excellent accomplishments, father. He makes the verses which he sings so well himself. But come, the dew is falling. You must not catch cold, father. Gentlemen, we meet at supper.”

She moved away with her father, leaving the two courtiers on the lawn.

“ It is well, Vyvyan,” said the one who had not yet spoken, “ that your suit depends not upon the favour of the lady. If it did——”

“ If it did, Master Harry, there would be small chance of your getting anything out of its success. Is all arranged ?”

"First, let us remind each other of the advantages. It is a goodly property, Sir Vyvyan."

"It is."

"Ten thousand pounds a year, I make it."

"Perhaps it is."

"Two thousand down for Harry Markham, or the match does not come off."

"We arranged for one thousand."

"We did. It suits me to change the arrangement. Rearrange now for two thousand. Don't bluster, sir knight, or perhaps I shall put a stop to the business altogether. Two thousand."

"Well, well," returned the other impatiently, "be it so. Tell me all you have done."

"You will make my excuses for me at supper. After supper, when the old man is asleep, and the varlets are all in the kitchens stuffing their greedy holds, bring out the lady as usual upon the lawn. Come without your sword. Stroll as near the wood as you can without exciting suspicion. When you turn to go back, four stout fellows in masks will rush from the trees and slip the girl. She will be gagged and borne away before she has time to shriek. As for you, we are going to gag and blindfold you, to prevent suspicion."

"Where will you take her to?"

"Till nightfall—there is little enough night now—to the edge of the park only; then, gagged and blindfold, across country to my own place, whither you may come to-morrow."

Sir Vyvyan was silent awhile. Libertine as he was, his soul revolted from a deed of such daring atrocity. But his debts were too pressing. He held out his hand, saying gaily—

"*Au revoir*, then, since it must be done. 'Tis a pity that she refuses me on any other terms. Be ready at nine, Harry; and, mind, no violence."

The sun grew low, and presently the great bell of the Grange rang for supper. The twilight of June fell on the long grass slope, and deepened the shadows in the wood. Nine struck, and voices were heard whispering in the trees. Then there came from the house a female figure, wrapped in the blue

mantle which Lady Catherine had worn in the afternoon. She stooped, looking for something in the grass.

"My lady said it was left out here, on the grass; and the dew will spoil it, and put it out of tune. Perhaps 'tis—Ah!"

For, at a low whistle, four men, masked and armed, rushed from the wood, and seized her, shrieking. Before they succeeded in gagging her—for she was a stout wench—she had torn the mask from one of them, and made the woods echo with her cries.

Among the first who ran out was Sir Vyvyan himself, pale and trembling. He was followed by the serving-men, armed with whatever weapons came handiest.

"Keep back, you fools!" he cried, endeavouring to prevent their rushing into the wood.

"Keep back! You mean go on, I suppose?" shouted the butler, heading the attack.

But there was no fight; for the next moment the girl herself had escaped from her assailants, and was rushing breathless across the green.

"Oh, my lady!" she cried—"my lady, have a care. It's you they want, not me! 'We've caught the maid instead of the mistress,' said Mr. Markham himself."

"Mr. Markham! What is this, Sir Vyvyan?"

"How should I know, my lord?" returned he sullenly.

"But you do know, sir," said the girl; "for Mr. Markham said as he rode off, 'Sir Vyvyan has missed the mark this time.'"

"Bring Sir Vyvyan's horse, saddled and bridled. Come, Kate, this is no place for you," said the old lord. "I regret, Sir Vyvyan, that I am not ten years younger, that I might demand the only reparation possible."

"I regret, my lord, that I cannot give it you, for the same reason."

They bowed, and the old man passed into the house, Sir Vyvyan standing, pale and scornful, in the doorway. Presently his horse was brought to him. All this time the murmurs of the servants were becoming more and more threatening. At last an ominous whisper went through them—

"To the horse-pond with him!"

Sir Vyvyan mounted slowly, glancing with an evil eye

among the men. The murmurs became cries; they hooted and hissed. One threw a stone, which missed. Sir Vyvyan half turned his horse, and faced them all with drawn sword.

They fell back. He turned again, followed to the park gates by the hooting rabble, not one of whom dared to be the first to attack the glittering gentleman.

Once outside the park, he put up his sword, and, without even turning to look at the rustics, rode off along the bridle-path at a quick trot.

And in the scene, which changed like a panorama, I saw how he made straight for Harry Markham's place; how he met him on the steps; how hot words were interchanged; and how, in the midsummer moon, two bright blades crossed for a moment, and one form fell.

A lofty turret chamber, lit with a single oil lamp. A grey, wizened old man. A furnace, and chemical instruments and bottles. Great books lay on the chairs, on the table, on the floor. A deep red flameless fire—a crucible upon it; and over it bending the withered old man, watching with hungry eyes and shaky hands.

"The *aurum potable*," he murmured—"the Elixir of Life! A short half-hour and it will be mine! This time it shall not fail me! Ninety years of age—ninety years to-day: and all my fellows killed or dead, disappeared, by war and battle and plague! And I—ha! ha!—going to begin a new life, to renew my youth!"

He looked into the mirror, and rubbed his hands.

"Ha! ha! Now shall all these wrinkles change into the smooth cheeks of youth. Now I shall find out the secrets of what men call happiness. Now I shall know what it is to love a woman. Grey hairs, you shall become brown! Sunken cheeks, you shall be full again! Bending shoulders, you shall be upright! Oh, that the time was come!

"Half an hour! But patience, patience! A short half-hour against a never-ending youth—a little delay, and then the perennial flow of enjoyment and pleasure!

"Youth! I had no youth! What to me were the smiles

of maidens? What to me were the greetings by the fountain, and the festivities in the house? I had my work, day and night—to learn my father's secrets, to carry on his labours. My ninety years of life have been ten years of childhood and eighty years of unremitting toil. But for this surely the time has not been wasted; for I have snatched from the heavens their secret, and have made myself immortal. No feasting, no delights for me! A long, long search! In the town below, not one who knows my face or recollects that I am in being! A life of care and thought, troubled by the fear of premature death before my secret is known!

“What shall I do with my new and brighter life? My bottle will last me a hundred years, and it will take twenty to make more. I shall get a disciple, and teach him the secret. I shall carry my treasure at my heart, and draw it drop by drop: every drop another year of life! Then shall I revel with the best—safe of my life so long as I have my bottle. Then I shall explore the pleasures of the life I have looked at from my tower, and find out why these common people—these ignorant, poor, miserable wretches, can yet laugh and be merry with each other. For perhaps I too, at last, shall get a light heart. Women are said in the books to love the young and rich. Good: I shall be young and rich. I shall be, if I please, nobly born; because all the honours of the world lie ready for him who is rich enough to obtain them.

“And if I tire—but ten short minutes more!—of man and his pleasures, it is but to come back here and wrest more secrets from Nature, day by day; never getting tired, never exhausting the exhaustless, till at last between me and the Great Creator there stands no secret but the last—the unanswerable secret of new life. And perhaps—perhaps——”

“But five minutes more! Oh, moment long looked for, come at last! How shall I——”

A little noise startled him from his meditation. He rushed to the furnace; but too late—too late! The crucible lay overturned upon the coals, and its priceless contents, the work of seventy years, were poured into the fire. Seeing his work so ruined, he fell senseless to the ground.

When he recovered, and raised his head, he saw that the old turret chamber was changed. He was in a room in the town below. Outside the bells were clanging and ringing; inside, a wedding—his own wedding. He himself—bright, tall, handsome—a young man of four-and-twenty, was sitting with his bride's hand in his.

"This is what should have been," said a Voice. "Learn the Mystery and Greatness of love."

They drank to the happiness of the newly-married pair. They praised the courage and the generous qualities of the bridegroom himself, and the sweetness and beauty of the bride—his own. As he looked—this poor old ruined alchemist—his heart beat and his eyes softened, for he felt at last what love would mean.

But the scene changed. This time, a house, with children playing and laughing—his children. As he watched their pretty ways, and saw their mother, grave, kind, tender, watching their every movement, his heart beat again with a higher pleasure still; for he was a father, and loved his boys.

"Learn," said the Voice, "the Sweetness of love!"

Then one sickened and drooped. It was the time of the Great Plague. He, in the vision, sent the mother and the rest to the top of the house, and stayed below with the sick boy. The hours of watching passed away slowly. The boy grew delirious. In his wandering, he prattled of his father—himself. Outside the door he could hear the mother praying and sobbing. By the bedside, he, too, praying that the life of his eldest might be spared. But all in vain. For the boy, throwing his poor arms about his father's neck, laid his head against his cheek and died.

"Learn," said the Voice that spoke before, "the Bitterness of love, the Sacredness of grief, and the great Mystery of death!"

Once more he looked. He saw two old, old people. About them, children and grandchildren. Their hearts were full of memories sweet and sacred. They had had their joys together and their sorrows. They had suffered and borne each other's burdens. They had grown a part of each other. As he looked, the content and trust that lay in the figure's heart passed into his, and he lay back, happy.

"You want to live—you!" whispered the Voice; "and this is what you should have been—not tired of life, but content to die."

Then they showed him his many years of grimy, selfish, anxious life, with no thought save for himself—no care for the people who struggled around him; his life all centred in that room; no nobleness in his search for Nature's secrets, because he wanted them all for his own good. And then he looked at the broken crucible, and sighed.

Lastly, they showed him what he might have become if his crucible had given up its terrible secret: how selfish he would be, how more and more incapable of happiness, because he alone would be separated from his fellow-men; how his perpetual youth would be a perpetual misery, his life become a burden to him; how he would sit down and cry for death, which would never come to him; how he would curse the day when he found the Elixir of Life.

The clouds rolled over all; and I know not what became of the old alchemist.

This time, a cold and cheerless night, on a desolate heath; a girl, very young, wandering backwards and forwards, wringing her hands.

"He loves me not! He used to say he loved me. I must die."

Close to her lay the dark, deep pool she sought—fringed with tall reeds, and covered with green weeds. One step more, and she would have found it at her feet. She stopped, held back by an invisible Hand.

"Oh, to die!" she murmured; "to finish the long waiting—to end an agony greater than I can bear!"

She quickened her steps; but in the dark and lonely path she did not know whither they led her. They were leading her back to her own house. As she went along, the Wind, sighing in the briars, sang a song of comfort to her.

"He is untrue," it sang, "and thou art unhappy. Well, beyond thee lies the pool. It is dark, and deep, and cold. There wilt thou lie—a silent witness of his falsehood and

thy love. Thither will come, when they find thee, thy father, white with sorrow; thither, all who have known and loved thee; thither, the idle and curious, eager to gaze upon the dead features of one who could not endure her lot; thither, too, will come one who has loved thee better all his life—more truly, more unselfishly—than he who has deceived thee. Till all who have loved thee die, no happy day shall be theirs. Take thy revenge. Go, drown—drown—drown thy life, young and much loved, in the pool before thee.

“He is old—thy father. He has no child except thyself. Is it not well done, after being his joy for eighteen years, to kill him with sorrow? It will help thee to die, knowing that he will die too. Unselfish girl, take the leap—the pool is not far off!

“And the other who has played thee false? He thought he loved you, but he loves Phœbe better. Punish him for not knowing his own mind. Make his life one long chain of sorrow and remorse. This will be well done.

“As for Edward, he loves thee still. That is not his fault. It will help thee to die—will it not?—to know that bitterness will be brought upon him till he die too.”

Thus the Wind. But as she wandered on, her footsteps slackened, and her clasped hands fell at her side; and suddenly she started back—and there, before her, stood her own house, silent and asleep, and the little gate open by which she had passed. She burst into silent weeping, and prayed to be forgiven her great wickedness, as she crept back into the house, unseen and unsuspected.

Once more the clouds fell, and rolled back for the last time.

A rich, well-wooded, open country; the heart of a forest, rolling hill and valley, where stately trees stand like kings guarding the land—their gnarled and knotted branches, like so many stout arms, bidding defiance to the storm, yet scarred by the many battles they have fought; the falling year clothing them with a rich prodigality of golden foliage, and the ground all piled and heaped with the leaves of this year and the last.

Under one of the oaks, in the long grass—it is afternoon,

and the warm October sun is full upon his young face—lies a Cavalier in the dress of Charles the First's time. His arm is bound with a cloth; his cheeks are worn with suffering; his eyes are turned to the west, with a sort of eager hope and longing. He lies quite still and motionless.

"Four by the clock, if I guess right; and Marian should be here by three. What can keep her from coming? Surely—but that is impossible—no one can have dogged her. Her father cannot suspect. And I am thirsty, and dare not go down to the brook."

A light step and a rustling in the bushes, and a young girl stood before him. She held a basket in her hand, and looked flushed and terrified.

"I could not come the usual way, Everard. Reuben, the new steward, met me at the great gate of the house, and asked me 'Whither away?' I told him—Heaven forgive the falsehood——"

"Heaven smiles at love's falsehoods, fair sweetheart. It only never forgives those who——"

"O Everard! If you were dying, you would pay me compliments. But it is too serious. I dare not trust a soul."

"Not even Dorothy?"

"No. I saw Sergeant Put-on-the-whole-Armour kissing her last night in the garden."

"Doubtless the kiss of a saint. Do you think she prefers the kisses of that devout warrior to fidelity to her mistress?"

"Nay, Everard, I know not. But if she loves the man—See, now—stop kissing my hand, now—see what I have brought you. A venison pasty, bread, two flasks of wine. Can you make them last till to-morrow night, when I will endeavour to bring you more? And once this week over, the soldiers will go away, and my father with them; and you can escape. But, O Everard! the risk to you! And it is unmaidenly in me to come here alone, day after day, and even by night. If my father knew——"

"Your father knows at least that Sir Everard is a man of honour."

"Alas!" said the girl, "we are fallen upon evil times!

Hark!—what is that? The sound of arms and men! Quick—quick—Everard! they are not fifty yards off! Pray Heaven they do not see us!”

She hurried the Cavalier, who had been wounded in the leg as well, and moved with difficulty, within the hollow of the oak, and knelt in front, looking fearfully through the bushes.

There were six men, dressed in leather jerkins and steel breastplates, with iron hats. In their hands, pikes; at their belts each bore a great pistol.

“’Twas by a hollow oak you told us we should find him, Sergeant Put-on-the-whole-Armour. What did the girl tell you?”

“She said her mistress went forth daily with a basket of provisions; that she followed her once out of curiosity; that she traced her, at nightfall, to a hollow oak, where lay a Cavalier, wounded at Worcester—none other than Sir Everard Arden himself, for whom we have a warrant and a reward. She told me to put myself in a line with Huntstall Hill and the church tower, and half an hour would bring us to the spot. Behold, I see the hill and the tower in a line. But where is the oak?”

“Alas!” murmured the girl, “my Everard, we are lost!”

She fell upon his breast, silently weeping. Both listened eagerly.

“Huntstall Hill, methinks, would be in a line with the church tower for miles around,” said the leader of the party.

And then I saw what had five minutes before seemed a sharp peak now showed like a broad and flat down; so that no point could be taken to connect with the church tower. Also, what had been a few straggling bushes and brambles between the men and the tree, looked now like an impenetrable thicket. They stumbled over roots, they stepped upon adders. They wandered backwards and forwards, examining all the trees but the right one. And then the evening fell, and a heavy mist arose.

“Sergeant,” said the captain, “thou art a fool and an ass!”

“Nevertheless,” the sergeant replied meekly, “the maiden did give me such and such instruction, even as I set it forth.”

"Thou art a fool again, and a worse fool than I suspected. Dost not see that she was fooling thee? Sergeant, the wiles of the devil have been at work. Pray, why did the maiden tell thee all this?"

"Passages of Christian affection have been conducted betwixt us," said the Sergeant, with a snuffle. "Verily, I have looked upon the maiden with eyes of liking."

"Liking, and this day's march is the end of it, and Sir Everard is doubtless escaped by the other side of the hill! Sergeant, thou art indeed an ass! Back, men, and let us thank the Lord for the wits he has given us!"

They strode off. As they marched through the forest the mist went with them, so that they lost their way.

Then the lovers lifted their heads; and the girl, falling on her knees, betook herself to prayer and praise aloud. As she prayed, another step—but so light that neither heard it—outside the oak; and in a moment a man of middle age, of grave aspect and gravely clad, stood at the opening of the hollow tree, and looked in. The moon fell full upon the praying girl and the face of her lover, who gazed at her as Dante gazed at Beatrice.

"Marian!" cried her father, for it was he.

She started to her feet like a frightened deer.

"Blame her not," interposed her lover—"unless, indeed, she is to blame for saving the life of a Royalist!"

"Nay, Sir Everard," said he, "I come not to reproach. I have known all along the secret of these daily visits. I trust my daughter; I trust my old friend's son. Only the babbling of a mischievous girl had nearly ruined all. I have procured your pardon, young hothead, on condition that you go across the seas. That condition we will get removed at an early opportunity; and perhaps you may find Holland not so unpleasant a country, with Marian to help dissipate the spleen."

Marian fell weeping on her father's neck, and we saw them wending their way from the forest in happiness and love.

CHAPTER V.

“ ‘ Alas ! ’ quoth Puck, ‘ a little random elf,
Born in the sport of nature, like a weed,
For simple sweet enjoyment of myself. ’ ”—HOOD.

PUCK, who had sat perfectly still during the performances, lifted up his head when they had finished, and spoke.

“ King Oberon,” he began, “ I no longer know if I exist or not. Men used to call me Puck, Robin Goodfellow, Brownie. I was their friend, though I played them a thousand pranks. They speak of me no more—I am forgotten. May I tell my sorrows ? ”

“ Speak on, dear Puck,” said Titania.

“ It is but a short week since I went into a farmer’s cellar, all out of pure kindness and friendship. His cider was fermenting; his cheese turning mouldy. I worked the roller round. I freshened the cheeses. And then, for I was athirst with my labours, I drank but one small cask of ale, and waited till he should come down, to hear the thanks that once I should have got. He came—with him his little daughter. He looked at his cider.

“ ‘ Good,’ he said; ‘ that’s the mixture I put in yesterday.’

“ Then at his cheeses.

“ ‘ Looks as if the place was damp ! ’ said he.

“ Then he came to the cask. Some of it lay in the saw-dust, where I had spilt it.

“ ‘ Hallo ! ’ he said. ‘ A whole cask gone ? ’

“ ‘ O father ! ’ said the little girl, ‘ it must be Brownie ! ’

“ ‘ Brownie be dommed ! ’ said the father. ‘ There’s a leak in the cask. Run up and tell your mother, child.’

“ In the dairy, the maid was churning.

“ ‘ Drat the butter ! ’ she said—‘ it won’t come ! ’ and churned away till her arms ached. Then I gave it one turn when she was not looking, and the butter came.

“ ‘ Good gracious ! ’ she said, ‘ it’s here all the time ! ’

“ ‘ Mary,’ said the little child gravely, ‘ that’s just what Brownie does, and the fairies.’

“ ‘Don't talk nonsense about fairies,’ said Mary. ‘It's all rubbish from your picture-books.’

“At night I pinched her black and blue. She got no sleep. But even then she was unconvinced. Said it was fleas.

“Next morning I put things to rights in the parlour before she came down. Only said master's pipe had been uncommonly tidy last night.

“So the morning after, when she had put things straight, I upset them again. Her mistress called her a good-for-nothing girl, and threatened to send her home to her mother. But no faith—no belief—none!

“That night I met two young fellows coming home from a Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society, where they had been hearing a lecture on the debasing influence of old superstitions. They were talking about it as they went along. They walked on stoutly. Presently the path lay through a copse, where the moonlight touched the old trees, and made strange fantastic shapes out of the branches. I sat on an old trunk in the moonlight, and made faces at them. They pretended not to see; so I became more hideous, and threw about my arms in mockery. Then they fairly stopped, trembling, and catching each other by the arms.

“ ‘Lord, have mercy upon us!’ cried one.

“ ‘And save Thy Church militant here on earth,’ replied the other, from the Liturgy, as soon as he could recollect anything from the Prayer-book.

“ ‘Bob—it's—it's a—real ghost.’

“Bob only replied by the chattering of his teeth. But the moon went behind a cloud, and I left off jibbering.

“ ‘I think it's only a tree. Let's go and look.’

“They found nothing but a tree; but that did not prevent them from tripping over a blackberry bush, and scratching their hands and faces.

“This time I was with my lantern in the marsh, and crying like a lost child. Their nerves were already a good deal shaken.

“ ‘Wh—what is that?’ cried the first who saw me.

“ ‘It is a light. Is it a Will o' the Wisp?’

“ ‘No, nonsense; there’s no such thing—Mr. Hardnails said so to-night. It’s a child. Listen. Come to its help.’

“They grasped their sticks, and made for the light. I kept away from them, leading them deeper and deeper into the marsh, till their way was lost; and it was not till daylight that they got out again—wet, torn, and weary.

“And, after all, their friends only accused them of getting drunk.”

“You all know me,” said Mab softly, lifting her delicate face—“you all know me. Hear now my story, and how I spent my last nights in England.

“Two days ago I found an old woman weeping by the fire-side for her long-lost sailor boy. I sent her to sleep, and showed him to her, bright, strong, prosperous, but far away. She awoke again to hope, because she believes in dreams.”

“How if her son does not return?” asked the Gnome King.

“Nay, he will not, because he lies ten fathoms deep in the sea for many a year. But she will die soon; and while she lives she will be happier.

“I found two fair-haired children, sleeping with interlaced arms, under the shade, their cheeks almost touching each other, for they had fallen asleep with a kiss; and while they slept I showed a dream of life—a panorama, painted in childish colours, lay stretched before them; and they saw themselves straying, hand in hand, for ever beside the stream of Time. They grew up together, and had the same sports; they had no troubles, because he was so strong and she was so good and wise; they never grew old, and they never grew tired; they were never sorry, never anxious, never ill. In the dream one spoke to the other, and said—

“ ‘We will always love each other, and our life shall be as those before us.’

“Then, in their dream, they kissed and promised eternal love.”

“How if they separate, and never see each other again?”

“Nay, I know not,” said Mab. “I cannot prophesy—only I can soothe and charm; and my children, awaking, found that each had had the same dream. And then they kissed,

and went home hand in hand. Surely, it will be good for the children to keep this dream in their minds as the years go on. Love may die; but courage, strength, and patience will last them all their lives.

"Next I saw a clergyman brooding over his own advancement. I threw back the curtain of Time while he slept, and showed him his own youth.

" 'What do I see?' he asked.

" 'Look again,' I said. 'Recognise that pale brow, and those eager eyes. Do you not know the boy, so full of holy fire, so eager for the future, so careful of the mother who pinched for his sake? Remember how the victory was won and the prize obtained. Think of the early days, when your holy duty was above your own interest; and to lead poor men to the love of God was a higher thing than to make yourself a bishop.'

"He read the past; and then I showed him the present, and how the spiritual life in him was deadened by his ambition and greed. He awoke with the firm resolve to fight the demon of self, who had well-nigh bound him hand and foot.

" 'Shade of my youth!' he cried, 'I have sinned against my glorious youth. I have sinned against my promise and my hope.'

"I found the little schoolboy asleep in the boarding-house. I took him away with me, and showed him his home, his pony, and his dog. He played with his sisters, he bathed in the pool, he fished in the river; and he awoke in the morning freshened and happier.

"To the exile—for I sometimes wilfully deceive—I showed his country, and his old friends greeting his return. To the poet I gave the fame which he will never get from men. In his dream, he was the idol of the people. They sang his songs in the streets; they cried after him when he walked abroad; they showered their honours on his head; they fanned their own enthusiasm with his burning words.

"I found the student poring over his books, conscious of the many better runners in the race than himself. In his dreams I showed him his own name first on the list; and he heard the shouts of his friends, and was happy.

"I made poor girls who will never be loved dream of the tender cares of a home; young men who will never find a girl to love them dream of bright eyes and fond hearts. I made the sick man dream of health; and lastly, to the profligate, worn-out and case-hardened, I showed the simple and kindly pleasures of the home life, so that, if for a moment only, a pang of remorse shot across his seared and selfish breast. Tell me, Titania, have I done well?"

"My Mab, if only thou hadst been always so," said the Queen.

"Then take my sceptre and my crown, for I am no longer Queen of Dreams."

She laid both down at Titania's feet, and resumed her place with a sad smile.

Then Ariel took his lute, and sang another song:—

"Over the dew-dropped lawn,
Brushing the drops away,
Fairies have come and gone:
Who are so merry as they?
Over the dew-dropped lawn,
Under the greenwood bough,
Dance they as dance we now.

"Merrily dance the waves,
Under the rocks in the bay,
Into the dark, deep caves,
Leaping and flying away.
Merrily dance the waves,
Merrily over the sand,
As we do, hand in hand.

"Waves the ripening sheaf,
Silvered white in the moon;
Dances the delicate leaf,
Stirred by the west wind's tune.
Dances the delicate leaf,
High on the trembling tree,
Merrily as dance we.

"Fitly on fairies' round
Dances the village ring;
Where the fairies' songs resound,
Fitly the folk may sing.
Merrily dance around
In the ring of the joyous elves;
Dance we now ourselves.

“ Hand in mine, sweetheart,
 Let the tossing ringlets rest,
 One of them light on my heart,
 All of them deep in my breast,
 Never from me to part.
 Play on, harp and horn ;
 Dance we till break of morn.

“ Voice with voices ringing,
 Chanting an ancient lay ;
 Lads and maidens singing,
 While we the night away.
 Flowers in wild sport flinging,
 Dance we till purple dawn
 Reddens the moonlit lawn.”

CHAPTER VI.

“ And wilt thou leave me thus ?
 Say nay—say nay, for shame.”—SIR T. WYATT.

“ **T**HESE are some of the stories with which we fill men’s brains,” said Oberon. “ You have seen our sports and heard our stories, fair brother of the Gnome Land. What now remains ? To be gone. Are there any changelings to restore before we part ? ”

“ Alas ! ” said Titania, “ there are none. I had one but a short time since. I stole him from his mother’s nest when he was but a year old, and kept him till he was seven. I had filled his young soul with all sweet and tender fancies. I had breathed music into his ears, which he should remember in after years. With me he had roamed the mountains, and learned to love all things that live. He forgot in a few days the Fairy Queen, his nurse ; but he remembered my teaching, and the longing for beauty with which I had filled his soul. He was to be a poet—I meant him to be the poet of the people. I wanted him to bring the folk back a little from their feverish thirst for wealth, and get them once more to love nature. He was to turn the hearts of the rich to consider the poor, and the hearts of the poor so that they should not for ever be envying the rich. For, oh, Oberon, the rich in this country grow ever richer, and the poor poorer ! The struggle for life is harder, the tempta-

tions are greater, selfishness and greed increase : luxury grows more and more, corrupting the lifeblood of the people, eating into their courage like a cancer, and the sweet contentment is wholly gone. I hoped that he would stand in the gap, and stay the flood. Perhaps, too, I hoped—for we are ever an unreasoning folk—that people would cease to burn with an insatiable desire for knowledge. Why can they not be content to know, and yet not understand, some things? There is a sweet bliss in ignorance—credulity is not always productive of evil.”

“Did he so teach the people?” asked Oberon.

“No. He is a great poet, but he has left our greenwood life. He does not sing to the people, but to his own learned kind. The sweet music which I taught him is wedded to the ways of men. He deals in mighty problems of the brain ; and if the common people read him, they cannot understand. A poet, because I made him one ; but of the town, not of the forest. I have had many changelings, but none I loved so well as this fair-haired English child, now the careworn fighter among men. I saw him but a week ago. He was ill, and they had sent him away to the pleasant coppices of his boyhood. I found him sitting in one of his old haunts, thinking. Through his brain floated dim memories of things long forgotten. He could not give them shape or utterance till I whispered in his ears. Then for a little he gazed upon the picture of the past, and saw Elf-land once again—only for a little ; for when I let him go, the troubles of the world once more clouded his brain. I let him go : he is lost to us. Yet, from time to time, a touch of the past makes itself felt in his poetry, and he remembers again the fancies of his youth. Better had he passed away his life in ignoble ease, wandering by the banks of the brook, catching the soft spring air in the leaves, loving and being loved in simple fashion. The world is hard upon my poets. Some starve ; some turn their genius to basest ends ; some let their genial fire degenerate to a feeble spark ; some minister to the vanity and some to the passions of men ; some debase the power of song to party purposes ; some—but a very few—single-hearted and true, roam in the woodlands, and sing of love and charity. But alas ! since my poor Hood died, I have had no poet.”

"They believe in us no more," said the King. "We were associated with things beautiful, things weird, things kindly; but all things pass away, and we with them."

"After all," said Puck, "it would be very unpleasant for us to stay here, even if they did believe in us. The smoke of the factories poisons us; there are hardly any forests where we can lurk; no rivers but are foul with refuse; hardly any commons but are enclosed by the Lord of the Manor. They've stolen great slices of Epping Forest, and wanted to build over Hampstead Heath; and on the sea-shore are the Coast-guard."

"It is the worse for them," said Oberon. "Woe to those whom the fairies love not! We go where Orion's belt is only dimly visible, rising in the north: there we may find comfort. Their hearts will only grow harder when we have left the land. Knowledge will come without Wisdom, Riches without Content, Power without Greatness, and everything without Love."

"It will be the worse for the children," said Titania. "They will lose all the pretty legends which made life a romance to them. Why should they learn hard things? Why should they be taught the lesson of utility, in this iron age, so soon? Why should they not, like the brave men of old, be taught to cherish the memories of the good people? They are little chemists now and little philosophers; little linguists, little scorners and scoffers at what they cannot understand."

"I showed myself to one but yesterday," said Ariel. "He had been reading 'The Tempest'—a bright little boy of twelve, but that his eyes were already short-sighted; and he wore spectacles. Also his face was pale with recent study. I thought I had one believer yet. But, no—he looked at me with wondering eyes as I floated before him; and then, with sudden vehemence, he exclaimed, 'Dyspepsia!' I vanished in disgust. He went home, and told his father—

"'I've just had a curious spectral illusion, produced by cerebral excitement, I suspect, unless the liver is out of sorts. I saw Miss Henrietta Hodson, as Ariel, floating above me. Give me the ingredients, father—I had better take a blue pill.'"

"'You want a week's holiday, and play,' said his father.

"'Nonsense, sir,' returned the boy. 'But then you cannot

be expected to understand these things. Play, indeed! I shall go to the gymnasium for a quarter of an hour longer every day till the examination is over.'

"After all," continued Ariel, "he was not reading 'The Tempest' for pleasure. He was cramming it for a competitive examination. See, he dropped a paper. Here it is:—

"STUFFINGHAM COLLEGE.—An examination will be held on December 24th, and the six following days, except Christmas Day, for a scholarship, value £50 a year, tenable for four years, open to boys under the age of thirteen, in the following subjects:—

Greek.

The Prometheus Vincetus.

Latin.

Lucretius and his Philosophy.

Geography.

The Isle of Wight.

Mathematics.

Algebra, as far as Probabilities.

The Theory of Long Waves.

The Calculus of Finite Differences.

Physiology.

The Structure of the Cranium.

The Antistaltic Action.

Philosophy.

The Correlation of Mind and Matter.

Spinoza and his School.

The Church Catechism.

History.

Universal, with Dates.

Contemporary History.

The Debates of the London School Board.

Languages.

Finnic, Wallachian, and the Ancient Cornish. Any two may be taken up. The answers must be in French and German, in alternate lines.

Spelling—To Words of Four Syllables.

Latin Verses.

The Four Elementary Rules of Arithmetic.

Shakspeare—'The Tempest.' ”

Oberon sprang to his feet, and interrupted the reading.

“ One act of justice we will do before we go, Puck. Be it thy business to visit this schoolmaster, and to torment him in his dreams. Use all thy ingenuity, my Puck. Torture him, and weigh upon his conscience with a terrible nightmare. He will say that something has disagreed with him. Never mind—make him remember this night. And, by my magic art, I command that all this wielder of the rod of Busby feels be presented before us. Hasten, Puck—thou hast but half-an-hour. Fly ! ”

A moment's pause, and Ariel sang again :—

“ Roll Time untiring, roll the ages by,
Through faith of man, not thine, we live or die :
By want of faith we die and pass away.

“ We drop, by unfaith, out of human heart :
From poet's brain and children's tales we part :
Our memories fade, we die and pass away.

“ They move the world whose hearts the fairies moved ;
The world loves those whom once the fairies loved :
They live, although we die and pass away.

“ Roll on the years, stern Time that resteth not ;
By unfaith lost, but yet not quite forgot :
We live for ever, though we pass away.”

CHAPTER VII.

“ Oh, see how early and before her time
The envious morning up doth climb,
Though she not lose her bed ;
Lest, taken with the brightness of the night,
The world should with it last, and never miss the light.”

—BEN JONSON.

IT was a bedroom, simply furnished. On the bed lay a man of middle age, with dogged lips and stern chin. On the pillow Puck whispering in his ears, whilst he tossed restlessly to and fro in his sleep. Then the bedroom seemed to sink and disappear, and the man, instead of lying in a feverish sleep on the bed, was standing in a vast and brilliantly lighted hall, dressed and spectacted. He looked round him. It was like some dream of Doré's. A network of pillars and arches mounted higher and higher, till they lost themselves in the lofty roof, where a wilderness of carved woodwork arched the expanse in bold, inextricable intricacy. Gorgeous coloured glass, such as our artificers no longer make, adorned the windows. They were painted with legends and scenes from Chaucer and Boccaccio. At the end, on the dais, stood a throne, whereon sat one aged and venerable, clothed in a mystic robe, grave and majestic. Round him, and scattered about the hall, were figures and forms of every shape, and time, and fashion : the sturdy Trojan and the lusty Greek : the stern old Roman and the courtly Elizabethan gallant ; the clown and the king, the lady and the beggar ; the burly mechanic and the scented courtier ; the soldier and the braggart ; the queen and the country wench ; the maiden and the martyr. They were conversing and singing—even fighting. They played with the daggers of their wit. One would lament his fate, another rejoice. There was no likeness between them. One king was unlike another king, one clown unlike another clown ; nor did one lover sigh like another.

Wondering and amazed, the schoolmaster stared around him. The faces looked strange, and yet familiar. He knew the tones of their voices, the fashion of their dresses. He knew the

features of the ladies—the goodliest company that ever was gathered together. But yet, for awhile, he wondered who they were. Then suddenly there flashed across his mind the name of Shakspeare; and he knew that he was in Shakspeare's Hall, and that the airy fabric in which he stood was peopled by Shakspeare's own creations. The crowned sage in the purple robe was none other than Prospero. Yonder Romans were Coriolanus and Anthony. There were Dogberry and Bully Bottom; there Sir John Falstaff with Poins, Bardolph, and Master Nym. Viola, Rosalind, Imogen, Beatrice, and fair Miranda were there, in beauty varying as the shades of evening. There Jessica sat with Lorenzo; Romeo here held in his arms the tender Juliet; bluff King Harry led Anne Boleyn by the hand; Cleopatra paraded her beauty to a wondering world. Othello rolled his jealous eyes; King Richard fondled his nephews with crocodile's tears; King Lear was followed by his three daughters, and his regal attendance of knights; Julius Cæsar strode proudly across the stage; Cressida made a thousand promises to Troilus; Malvolio strutted with yellow gaiters; Petruchio made strange love to Katharina; the melancholy Jaques sat apart and mused; and the host of figures, as thick as motes in a sunbeam, crossed his eyes, playing their parts for ever as the great magician had bidden them.

He stood in the midst with a vague fear; for all the faces, as they passed, scowled upon him. And when the deep voice of Prospero commanded that they should bring the mortal before him, his knees shook beneath him—he knew not why; for he was unconscious of any evil wrought or intended against Shakspeare. Four fellows, of fantastic garb and uncouth appearance, seized him, and roughly haled him before the throne.

"Spirits of the Poet's brain," said Prospero, "we have here a mortal who is charged with degrading and debasing us."

There was an angry growl; because, now, all the spirits in the hall were gathered in a ring. The poor schoolmaster looked round upon a sea of angry faces, and quailed.

"Most noble Prospero," he said, "I am innocent of debasing and degrading the creations of Shakspeare's brain. Let evidence be called."

"No evidence—no evidence! Tear him to pieces!" shouted the mob.

One voice alone pleaded for the offender. It was Cranmer. "My Lord Prospero," he said, "it is incumbent upon us to treat the cloth with respect. Let this reverend gentleman who is, I dare vouch, of otherwise blameless life, be fairly tried, and stand upon his truth and honesty. I was so tried myself, before King Henry's courtiers. So would I try all—even the clergy of St. Albans, who blacken my name."

"Mortal," said Prospero, "how art thou called?"

"My name," said the schoolmaster, "is Mr. Newlights. I am head master of Stuffingham College, whilom Senior Classic."

"Ay, ay—stick to the point, man—never mind your foolish degree," said Prospero. "Knowledge cannot be proved by examination, nor can wisdom be tested in the schools."

"I am descended from a long line of schoolmasters," he went on. "I am grandson of old Bishop Sterntickle, whose Latin verse book still forms our manual. I am son-in-law of the great Doctor Inutile Lignum, who wrote the famous treatise on the Digamma, which, of course, you all know too well for me to linger over it. I am——"

"Cease your prabbles," said a voice from the crowd, which I recognised as that of Sir Hugh Evans himself. "My Lord Prospero, make him come to the point."

"Silence in the court!" called an usher whom I remembered from the "Merchant of Venice"—"Silence, or we clear the court!"

"Mr. Newlights," said Prospero, "thy new light is but a sorry reflection of the old. Better hadst thou stuck to the ways of Bishop Sterntickle, or even Dr. Inutile Lignum. You are accused, again, of debasing US—US, the great and immortal—by making us the text-books of boys, the subjects for scholarship examinations. It is pleaded in the bill of indictment, drawn up by no less a person than Portia herself, that the effect of this new thing cannot but have a most pernicious and evil influence upon the character of the boys themselves, and their feelings as regards us. In the old days Shakspeare came to a boy, as soon as he could understand him, like a new world. He

brought to us the freshness of his early imagination ; he looked on us as a relief from work ; we were his recreation and his joy. What things were not good and useful for him to understand, no one explained to him ; what things were good and useful, his instinct picked out. Only the noblest and the best came to us : the worst, the ignoble herd, had no thought for us, nor we of them. Thou art accused of degrading the fancies of our Shakespeare, by making them the commonplace lesson-books of schools ; by subjecting our thoughts and immortal words to the rough handling of ignorant boys. Thou art further charged with corrupting the fountain of history, and trampling underfoot the delicate flowers of fancy. What hast thou to say ? ”

“ Truly, shepherd,” said Touchstone, nodding his head vindictively, “ thou art in a parlous state ! ”

“ Yea, marry,” said Dogberry, with dignity. “ Nevertheless, we will not refuse thy indications. Gossip Verges and I will hear thy condemnation, most notorious benefactor. Speak thou in thine own offence.”

“ Most noble Prospero, ladies fair, and gallant gentlemen,” began the culprit, “ hear me before you judge. In the first place, I do but as you did.”

“ How, villain ? ” cried Hotspur, half drawing his sword and starting forward—“ How mean you ? Was I, Harry Hotspur, a schoolmaster ? ”

“ Peace your lordship’s noble tattlings,” said Sir Hugh Evans ; “ you are a very simplicity shentleman. Let the varlet speak. I will smite his noddles.”

“ I do but as you were done by. Pray what did you learn in your youth ? ”

“ I learned to tilt and tourney,” said Hotspur.

“ I learned to keep my hands from stealing and my tongue from evil speaking,” said Launcelot Gobbo.

“ And I to make and mend,” said Bottom.

“ I learned the art of war and manly exercises,” said Julius Cæsar.

“ Is there no one here,” cried the poor man, “ who was properly taught—who learned things useful ? ”

“ What are things useful ? ” asked Prospero.

"Latin verses chiefly," replied the instructor of youth.

"What are they useful for?"

"They cultivate the mind: they—they develop the taste; they strengthen the intellect."

"How long does your education last?"

"Till twenty-three."

"And what can your pupil do then?"

"Nothing—that is, he can make Latin verses."

"And he says that he trains boys as we were trained!" growled Hamlet.

"This is evasion. Come to the charge."

"It is true," replied the accused, "that modifications of the old plan have been introduced. The boys are taught things of practical utility. They can describe the structure of the body."

"Can they ride?" asked Hotspur.

"They can make horrible smells in the laboratory."

"Can they fight?" asked Harry the Fifth.

"We discourage fighting. Boys in my school never fight. They contend amicably in athletic sports; but they funk each other's fists."

"That's a pretty state of things for England to have come to!" said Henry the Eighth. "Not fight! Why, what in the world—oh! Lord Prospero, I would hang this man!"

"But to the charge—speak to the charge!" said the judge.

"Did no one read Homer?" asked the schoolmaster.

There was a dead silence. No one in the hall had read Homer.

"Did no one read Virgil?"

Two or three nodded their heads, but cautiously, as if to imply that their acquaintance with Virgil was limited.

"Then," he said, "I do but as you; because my boys learn Shakspeare, even as you were taught at school Virgil, Ovid, or the Latin grammar."

There was a furious and common yell. One stepped forward.

"My lord, this man deserves condign punishment. One speaker will do as well as another, for all have been at school.

I am Bassanio, sir schoolmaster. Well I remember how we sat, grammar in hand, beneath the ferule of an angry pedant. For every slip of tongue or pen, for every slight mistake, there was but one punishment—the rod. Day by day were we beaten and ill-treated. The memory of that time made us hate the sight of a book or a written page. Even yet, at the name of Ovid, we move uneasily upon the chair. There was no mercy, no kindness, no leading by love. We were driven as cattle along the road of learning—only with this difference, that only the stray cattle are driven back to their places, and we received all alike the same impartiality of flogging. My lord judge, I speak in the name of this most august assemblage. He is convicted by his own mouth. He blasphemes our Shakspeare, because he makes him an instrument for the torture of boys.”

“We flog them no longer,” cried poor Mr. Newlights. “Schools are not what they were.”

“He prates lies,” said Sir Hugh. “You cannot teach boys without the ferule. I never could. No boys ever were better taught the rudiments than mine. Sir Newlights, do not lie.”

“Let me torment him, good master,” cried Caliban, reaching forward and clutching the wretch in his long and hideous arms. “Let Caliban pinch him, and beat him, and bite him, and turn him into strange stuff.”

“Take him, all of you, and work your will upon him,” said the judge.

I saw that the most gentle ladies and the most noble lords joined in the torture. They chased him round the hall with hounds of Crete; they lashed him with scourges from the Gaol of Vienna, brought by Abhorson himself; they put him into a buck basket, filled with linen for the wash, and tossed him out into the river; they pinched and pricked him under the oak of Herne the Hunter; they brought him to woo Katharina, who beat him over the head with a three-legged stool; they mocked him with a banquet of warm water; they cut pounds of flesh from him without blood; they made him fight with Tybalt; they drove him out, followed by King Lear’s Fool, on the coldest winter night.

Tired with their own revenge, they brought back their victim, pale, worn, and haggard, to the judge.

"Have mercy!" he groaned. "Have mercy!"

"Let him go," said Achilles; "he has had enough. As for Homer, I say nothing; but see how Shakspeare has treated me."

"Unbind his arms," said Prospero. "Tell me now, thou presumptuous knave, what dost thou learn from me and mine?"

"I learn to reverence wisdom and mercy. I learn how truest love and deepest purity go together, and are brother and sister."

"Lessons for manhood, not for boys. What have they to do with love? Teach them only that shame and remorse follow after evil-doing. Children have nought to do with villainy."

"What dost learn from me?" asked Othello.

"The folly of idle jealousy—the danger of a suspicious temper. Another lesson in womanly purity."

"Shakspeare is full of such," said the Moor; "but what have children to do with jealousy?"

He spoke not.

"What may one learn from me?" asked Jaques.

"Many things—such as that happiness belongs not to wealth; that man is but a puppet of circumstances, and hence our best wisdom is little better than the motley talk of fools; that pride and passion make slaves of us; that——"

"Rightly hast thou studied me," replied Jaques, with some pride. "That foolish Duke! Pardon me, your Grace—I knew not you stood so near."

"'Tis well answered," said the judge; "but is this a lesson for boys?"

"Ay, forsooth," interposed Dogberry, "answer me that, most well-favoured and disartful vagrom man. He is but an aspicious person, good sirs—an aspicious person."

"'Tis thin drink—thin drink, and too little of that, hath made him what he is," said Sir John Falstaff. "Let him have a cup of sherris sack. Pray, sir schoolmaster, what has your reverence learned from me—from poor old Jack?"

Mr. Newlights looked, but said nothing.

"I am a fit companion for beardless youth, am I not?"

continued the knight. "Pah! sir. Learn that Shakspeare was a roystering blade, and wrote for men."

"Silence!" said the judge. "Are the things you have named for boys and girls? Are the children to be made philosophers and cynics before the very days of school are over? Is the best blossom of youth, its trust and faith, to be gathered and thrown away before it is half blown out?"

"Canst thou learn aught from me?" asked Hamlet, who wore light hair, and had blue eyes, as becomes a Scandinavian prince.

The poor man looked puzzled.

"Many men say many things of thee, fair prince. Schlegel——"

"Pshaw! Prate not to me of Schlegel. I ask for thine opinions. Tell me—what am I?"

"Truly, I know not."

"And thou thinkest that children will? Why, noble sirs, here is a rascally knave for you, who flogs the boys because they cannot understand better than himself! Here is a man for you! Go to. Come with me, Ophelia."

Newlights was proceeding to explain again his brand-new system, by which the boys are made to flog each other, and taught to believe that it is a noble and elevating work, when he was pulled aside by an impudent-faced rogue, dressed in a suit of many colours.

"Look here, prisoner mine—knowest thou me? I am Autolycus—ha! ha!—knowest thou me?"

"I do. Thou art a knave."

"Right, right. How pat he hath it! A knave—ha! ha! —a graceless varlet: one who cheats country bumpkins, and picks young maidens' pockets; one who lives by lies and thefts, and sometimes gets whipped at the cart-tail. A good lesson for boys! Here is a better. Here is Judge Angelo—nay, never blush, my lord—he is good reading for children, is he not?"

"Peace, peace, sirrah!" said a gentle voice beside him. "Let King Lear speak."

The King was leaning on Cordelia's arm. "From me," he said, "you may teach the boys, an you will, that age is sometimes fond and foolish, liable to be blinded by flattery; also

that old kings are not so wise as their white hair and venerable appearance would betoken. So, too, you may teach them that women may be cruel, daughters unnatural; that falsehood and ingratitude abound in the world, even where we should least look to find them. 'Tis a lesson for age. Let experience bring it; let the children believe that authority is always venerable; let them not know that age is sometimes fond and foolish. Take me away, Cordelia."

"Much may be said about us," said the Merry Wives of Windsor; "but is it children's lore?"

"And learned from me," said Touchstone, "if only they understood the ways of the Court."

"And about me," said Parolles. "The conversation of a brave man and a soldier is——"

"Tush!" said the judge, "we waste words. Let him go. Caliban, chase him out."

Oberon raised his hand, and all vanished together. Puck was in his place, and in the east a grey streak showed that another day was about to dawn.

"Enough," said the King, "enough, good Robin. Well hast thou done. See, yonder glows the red dawn. Fairies, we stay no more. Titania, take your last look at an English sunrise. The last night is gone."

"The last night," echoed the elves, weeping.

The lights were paling fast, the stars were hiding their heads, the grey glimmer in the east grew brighter every moment.

"Sing, Ariel, our farewell song."

While he sang the Farewell of the Fairies, the music grew fainter and fainter, and with it his voice, till the last word was hardly audible at all :—

"Farewell, farewell! we pass away
From lawn, and field, and fountain;
And never more our feet may stray
On lowland or by mountain.
We fly from hedge and holly bush,
We part from wood and meadow;
We hide no more by fern or rush,
Nor lurk in evening shadow.

“ Farewell, farewell ! yet evermore,
 Where'er our sports and dances,
 The land we loved so well of yore
 Will live in fairies' fancies.
 Though childish days of fear be past,
 And simple days be perished,
 Yet tender thoughts of us shall last,
 While tender thought is cherished.

“ Farewell, farewell ! we part, we part !
 Ah ! days we leave behind us—
 Yet kindness, and simple heart,
 And love may ever find us.
 By coral reef, by purple strand,
 In Southern islet banished,
 Our hearts will yearn for thee, dear land,
 And loved ones long since vanished.

“ Farewell ! if aught of fairy song
 In man's remembrance linger ;
 If thought of us should wake the tongue
 Once more of woodland singer ;
 And if amid your noisy talk
 You yet remember clearly,
 Think kindly of the little folk
 Who loved your kin so dearly.

“ Come, Spring, with white May-blossom crowned,
 And scatter cowslips over ;
 Spread all the hedge with roses round,
 And all the fields with clover.
 Shine on, shine on, thou summer moon,
 Shine over wood and river :
 Oh ! land so fair, we part too soon—
 But ah ! we part for ever.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“ By tarn and rill
 The night birds all that hour were still :
 But now they are jubilant anew.”—CHRISTABEL.

EVERY light went out—the music stopped—the elves, with a last cry, disappeared : Puck last. Only Oberon and Titania were left. They stooped over me where I lay.

“ We go,” they said. “ Tell the people of England—tell them that we come no more till England be merry England

again, and they return to their good old belief; when the School Boards have done their work, and under the belief they were educating, have only taught a bundle of facts. Such confusion and destruction of everything thought stable will happen, that you will be glad to return to your old ways again. Then, perhaps, the village sports will go on as of yore, and the tales be told again around the blazing fire; and the dreams of equality, universal acquirements, socialism, and anarchy will be all gone away, like sick fancies of a fevered brain."

"When will that be, great King and Queen?" I asked.

"We know not—we never know anything but what is and what has been. We remember nothing painful: we have no sorrow, so we can have no prescience. It is only he who has suffered can foretell the future."

"Would that I had your Majesties' permission to set forth to the world, with what little art I know, humble as it is, the vision of this night."

"Our splendour," said the Queen, "is not to be painted or drawn; nevertheless, the intention is good. Having seen us, you at least will believe us. Do not DARE, sir, to wake up to-morrow morning, and say it was all a dream."

"I will not," I protested fervently.

"Forget not that you are the only living man who has ever seen us. And, in token of our kindness and good favour towards you, I leave you my globe—see, it is within reach of your hand—and my sceptre."

"And I," said Oberon, "my golden crown."

They laid down the glittering baubles, and disappeared.

"One Quarter—Gone is night;
Two Quarters—Hear my call:
Three Quarters—Now comes light!
Four Quarters—Wake ye all."

And then, with slow and solemn sound, as if it were the knell of night, the clock struck One—Two—Three!

I started to my feet, and looked around. It was broad daylight. The red dawn was glowing brightly in the east, and the day was really come. From the branches of the trees

in the forest came a confused twitter of the waking birds, and in the air already a murmur of waking insects. Day was here, and life, and light.

What of the night?

The lamps that hung upon the trees were turned into the white May-blossom; the throne had become a wild rose-bush; the canopy a hanging honeysuckle; and the globe and sceptre were an acorn and a reed. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. Yes, like all fairies' gifts, what was gold by night, and in their hands, had become a mere worthless thing of the woods in the daylight. Strange confirmation of the reality of what I had seen! So, also, my faith was strengthened by finding that King Oberon's crown was turned into a handful of primroses and cowslips; and my memory, so wayward in the trick of the brain, tried to persuade me that I had gathered them myself the day before. While—could I believe my own eyes?—Queen Mab's CHARIOT, the very chariot she had ridden in the night before, just as I had seen it, was transformed, without losing its shape, into a dry and yellow leaf! Beside it her wand, changed into a twig of ivy. There was the fairy ring, and there were the marks of their little feet. Only I missed the music that floated from the bushes, and the bubbling murmur of their laughter. But, surely, it was something to find proofs, clear and not to be impugned, of the truth of the statement I felt bound to make, and which I have made.

You still have doubts, dear reader? Be not ashamed: it is an incredulous age, as has been said before. Come, however, and see my trophies—the acorn, the withered flowers, the dry leaf, the reed, the ivy twig. I have brought them all away. I have had a photograph taken of the old oak. I keep them sacredly, and shall hand them down as an heirloom to my nearest and dearest. Meantime, they are used to confound the scoffer. Come and see them under their glass case. The acorn, as an acorn, is simple in shape, and hardly distinguishable from any other acorn; the dry leaf, as a dry leaf, has little remarkable in its appearance; the other things, were it not for sacred associations, might be passed over in absolute silence. And, really, this is the most remarkable circumstance of all

Going home through the dewy fields, I recalled the words of the good people, and their songs and dances. The woods and meadows were fresh with life and vigour, rejoicing in the light of day and the warmth of the rising sun; the lark, high above my head, carolled a roundelay of love and pride to his partner in the nest below; the stock dove cooed his soft love in the wood; and the flowers opened their tender petals. All was bright and fresh—even the smoke that went up from the little town to which I was returning.

“Not altogether vain,” I thought, “was the cult of the fairies—not a superstition that brought evil with it—a relic of Paganism touched with the light of the new religion, something to help us sometimes to shake off reality, and live in the ideal.

“Reality! Ideal! Why, which is which? The old nature-worship goes on as ever. Great god Pan never dies. What I have seen to-night was seen through that sixth sense—the love of the beautiful—which is the Blessing added to the Curse, for it sanctifies toil; and when we are weary with the world and its troubles, it helps to take us away to that land where everything is fair, and no one is weary.”

PART III.

From Fact.

ON THE GOODWIN.

IT was a wild night in October. The time, ten by the clock, if you could hear it striking. Outside, a gale blowing hard from the south-east, and rain that blew against the face like small shot. Inside my father just recovered from an attack of the gout, and more than usually genial and communicative; my mother at work on some trifle for the expected niece or nephew—in our family of eight married girls, there was at least one new arrival daily expected—and myself, reading a novel.

Presently, the tumult of the weather outside grew greater than I could well bear; and I threw down the book, and started up.

“Not going out in a night like this, Harry?” said my mother.

“Only to look at the weather. As far as the pier. I shall be back in half an hour.”

I changed my evening dress for a rough suit, put on a veritable tarpaulin, lit a cigar—which the wind reduced to ashes in three minutes—and sallied forth.

We were staying at Deal, where my father had taken a house for a few months. It was one of those houses, which the reader doubtless remembers, which lie north of the quaint old town, between Deal and Sandown Castle—that curious old ruin, which looks like some old wedding-cake pressed down and out of shape by a heavy hand, or like a Strasbourg pie which had been unlawfully sliced away longitudinally. They are new houses, facing the sea, and close to the shingly beach, off which I used to bathe in early morning, despite the prohibition of the authorities. We had been leading a lazy, shrimp-eating sort of a life for three months. I had nothing to do but to go on deluding myself into the belief that I was perfectly qualified to

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undertake certain responsibilities about to be conferred upon me in the Michaelmas term by the authorities of Lincoln's Inn. I dallied in the morning with law books till they bored me. Then I lit a pipe, and strolled over to Sandwich or to Walmer, where I made certain acquaintances with the Engineers, and watched scientific experiments. In the evening, we all three dined together, and so to bed—a truly innocent, Arcadian style of life. Only I was a little bored with it, and beginning to feel that the commencement of term and London would perhaps bring just a little more variety into one's daily existence. The old General, my father, had only two moods: that of excessive irascibility when the gout seized his toe—then we let him say all he pleased, praying silently that the fit might be a short one—and excessive geniality, when the good old fellow would roar with laughing as we mimicked one of his rages and inconsequential fits of unreasoning wrath while the gout was upon him. However, it was a great comfort for him to have me with him, greater still when I brought some fellows from Dover and Walmer to dinner; and so I stayed on.

I had heard—who has not?—of the Deal boatmen, their pluck, their greediness over salvage, their recklessness of life; but somehow they had evaded my search. I never seemed able to find a genuine boatman. It is true that the weather was too fine for the work of lifeboats, but surely they sometimes took exercise. As for identifying the shabby-looking men who lounged disconsolately along the beach with the Deal boatmen, I never for a moment thought of it. Sometimes I went deep-sea fishing, but not often; for if the truth must be told, the motion of the boat went far to counteract any pleasure I felt in hauling up the mackerel. Sometimes I lounged on the pier, when divers beauties of a semi-London type—that is, with seaside uniforms and London chignons and hats—disported their charms in the sea breeze, and gathered fresh bloom for the social festivities of that beloved Bloomsbury of which they were the pride and the ornament. Dear little unsophisticated girls! How often have these eyes marked you, as you saw my manly form advancing down the pier, my leg thrust out like an old Knave of Spades, my glass in my eye—really, I cannot see

without it—and exhibiting in my every attitude that readiness to introduce myself on the slightest encouragement, and to converse with unprotected beauty, which is the attribute of every Briton. As I claimed to call myself a gentleman, and the damsels were ladies, I refrained from demonstrating openly my desires, and they held out no signs of a corresponding readiness to fall in with my views. A verbose passage this; but the girls were really pretty and nice, and I should have liked to talk with some of them.

All this preamble is quite beyond my story, melancholy and tragic as it is; and I am almost ashamed to let it stand. But it shows in what mood of mind I was on that night when I sallied forth, during the great storm of 1867, to fight with the hurricane on the beach of Deal, little thinking what consequences were to follow to me and mine.

A night of hurricane and storm; a night on which a strong man like myself, of five and twenty, found it difficult to keep on his legs as the wind came sweeping across: a night when the wild spray dashed up the shingle against the windows of the Royal Hotel, and over the houses which still stand with their discourteous backs turned to the grand old ocean. I struggled onwards, and reached the pier. No admittance there. The gates were locked and the men gone. I clambered over, but soon came back, because the wind was strong enough to blow me away like a piece of paper, and I got tired of holding on by the railing, like clinging to the davits of a ship. I held on by the club-house, passed along the lee of the houses on the Walmer road, and presently came to the life-boat house, where a small crowd was gathered together, which I joined.

An animated discussion was going on, and the boat lay ready to be launched in the little house, which looks like a chapel. If a chapel is a haven of safety surely no better shape could be devised for the guardianship of a lifeboat.

I soon caught the subject of their talk. A ship—was it a ship, or a lugger, or a Boulogne potato craft? what was it?—was on the Goodwin Sands.

They were preparing, in all thoughtfulness—for messengers of life and death must needs go well prepared—to put out to

her assistance. No question, theirs, of the salvage. For all they cared, it might be the potato craft, or it might be a big ship. In the furious storm and darkness, all they could see was a single light, stationary, where no light ought to be stationary. Low tide, but the tide was rising every moment. So the needful operations, quick, but not hastened, went on; and all was ready.

All but one thing—the men. The captain, or coxswain, or whatever his legitimate title, looked round, and asked quickly—

“Where’s Tom?”

Where was Tom, indeed!

No answer. At last a small boy raised his voice and suggested that he was gone to Sandwich. The coxswain muttered what sounded more like an oath than a prayer, and looked round in perplexity. I fancied his eye rested for a moment on me. Forgetful of my promise to return in half an hour, I stepped forward, and clapped the man on the shoulder.

“Take me,” I said, “I can row—I have rowed in a dozen races. I am strong enough and in pretty good training.”

He looked at me curiously, and shook his head.

“Too dangerous, young gentleman. Mayhap you’ll lie down in the boat and cry, when we want every one to have his wits about him.”

“No,” I said, “I shall not cry, at any rate. Take me, and you’ll not repent it.”

He passed his hand up my arm, feeling the muscle with a sort of grim approbation. Then he conferred a minute or two with his crew. Then he turned to me, and said, gruffly—

“Come this way, sir.”

I followed, and was speedily rigged out in a suit of rough flannels belonging to the truant Tom.

“You may go, and if you get drowned, of course it bean’t our fault. You’ll do your best in the boat, I’m sure; and if anything comes of the venture—why, it’ll be Tom’s, I suppose.”

I agreed, of course, and we came back.

I do not know to this day how we got launched. In a wild, surging whirlpool of foam, wave, and wind, that blinded my eyes and nearly washed me off my seat, I found the boat fairly off the

shore, and was warned by the man nearest me, in a practical method—that is, by a pretty tough “punch” in the shoulders—to keep my wits about me. My thoughts, for the first ten minutes or so, were how to keep my hands tight to the oar, and hold it and myself in some kind of correspondence. Presently, I found that some sort of order could be observed in the waves, and some sort of regularity in the wind: that it always blew a gale, but sometimes it blew worse and sometimes worst. No one spoke—for that matter, no one would have been heard if he had been singing. How long did it last? I have not the faintest conception of time over the whole business. Looking back at it now, I seem to have lost all count of time. It seemed that my rowing had lasted an eternity; as if I had been always rowing; as if life never had been, in reality, anything, and never could be anything again, but sitting in a lifeboat, doing one’s best to keep one’s wits about one, to do one’s duty, and to row without shirking. Every now and then I felt a sort of vague wonder as to whether I should ever get back again; but, in the midst of those wild and furious waves, the sensation of battle was too strong to admit of fear. I may safely say that I was not afraid; and yet the storm was worse, I heard afterwards, than anything the boatmen had ever experienced before. There came a time more terrible than any we had had before, for we drew near to the wretched craft that had gone upon the sands. And now my pen fails me. I cannot describe the brief five minutes we spent alongside the vessel we had come to help. I could see nothing but a whirling crest of wave and foam breaking over her. I grew wild with excitement. I tried to keep myself calm and collected, but in vain. I only know that, in what seemed a moment, we were away from her again, with bows pointed to the shore; and that at the feet of the coxswain lay a woman’s form, crouched in a heap, senseless, inanimate. The sailors on board, I learned afterwards, had just time to sling the woman on board us, when a wave, greater and more furious than any of the rest, took the boat amidships—she was only a little craft, of thirty tons or so, laden with eggs and potatoes from Boulogne or Calais—and washed the little crew of half a dozen overboard together.

More battling with the spirits of the storm ; but this time we had the woman with us—one life, at least, saved ; and if ever men pulled with a will, we did on that fearful night.

Thank God !—the beach. Fifty stout hands to drag us up the shingle. Fifty men to help us out of the boat. Proffers of brandy enough to make a Dutchman drunk. And in the boat-house my old governor himself, trying not to look affected. He seized my hand first—for there was a lot of hand-shaking going on.

“Bravely done, my boy !” he said. “I’m proud of you ! And now make haste home, for your mother is anxious.”

“Stay a moment, sir. Let us first look after our passenger.”

They were lifting her out, and were touching her closed lips with brandy. She was still senseless. Young, with straight and regular features, long black hair that hung dank and dripping upon her shoulders, eyelashes that fringed her closed eyes, and lay upon her cold cheek. Dressed in some sort of silk, with one ring on her finger—not a wedding-ring—her bonnet had been blown away, with her shawls or wrappers, and a sailor’s jacket was thrown over her shoulders by one of the rough bystanders.

In a few moments she opened her eyes.

“Ah ! mon Dieu ! mon Dieu !” she murmured.

“She is a Frenchwoman,” I said to my father. “What is to be done with her ?”

“Done with her !—done with her ! Take her home with us, and look after her, of course. What should be done with her ? Here, my lads, bustle about ! Get a cart, or a carriage, or something. Bring her along, and fetch a doctor.”

The General gave his orders in his usual quick, abrupt fashion ; and presently a little procession was formed, and we marched through the town with our burden, who was sensible, but passively allowed herself to be carried.

They put her to bed, my mother sitting up with her ; and presently the doctor came.

“Young lady has had a shock to her nervous system. Little delirious at present, General. Soon get over it. Find out friends. Rejoice their hearts. Congratulate you on the

night's work, young man. You're a Deal boatman yourself, now."

There was nothing in her pockets but a purse with a little money: no letters; no name on her clothes, except the initials A. C.; nothing whatever to mark her identity. And she was delirious.

My mother attended her. The patient's brain was fixed upon one delusion. She thought that people were hunting her; she saw her persecutors approaching; she shrieked with terror as they drew nearer; she cried to my mother to hide her. And sometimes, when they seemed to have caught her, she would turn her face to the pillow and moan pitifully, declaring that she had not done it—that it was another—that it was his own fault.

"Great nervous shock," said the doctor. "Seems a lady. White hands. No work done by them, at any rate. Shall pull her round, General."

She took time, however, to be pulled round; and it was not till three weeks after her rough landing upon our shore that she came down one morning to breakfast, leaning upon my mother's arm, dressed in some white stuff, and looking wonderfully beautiful in her pallor and fragility.

"I cannot," she said, speaking French—"I cannot thank you sufficiently, M. le General—and you, madame—and you, sir, for all that you have done for me; and the time has come when I ought not only to thank you, and explain myself, but to prepare for my departure."

"No thanks necessary at all," growled my father. "We are not stocks and stones. Tell us only, mademoiselle, if you please, your name and address, that we may write to your friends, and set their minds at ease about you."

"Madame tells me that I have been delirious," she said; "and that, in my brain wanderings, I have never spoken of my friends—only of my enemies."

"Always as if you were being hunted down, my poor child," said my mother.

"It is curious, for I have no enemies; on the other hand, I have no friends."

“No friends, mademoiselle?—no relations?” asked my father.

“Only a cousin who is in the army in Algeria, and another who is in the *Infanterie de la Marine* in New Caledonia. Besides these, none. My name, my kind friends—whom I shall ever think of with love and respect—is Adrienne de Comarmond. My father—now dead, as well as my poor mother—was an officer in the army, a colonel. He left me in charge of his sister, my aunt, Mdlle. de Comarmond. She, too, died six weeks ago, and left me with nothing but a few letters of introduction to people in England, who, she said, would help me to get a situation as governess. To them I was going. But where are the letters? Alas! all is lost—my wardrobe, my letters, my little tokens of recollection, everything.” She stopped, and buried her face in her hands; then went on. “The captain of the little vessel which was wrecked knew my father well. He had been in his regiment years ago. He took me over, the poor man, for nothing. Ah, if I became rich, I would help his widow. And that, madame, is all my story. If you will add to your kindness by telling me of some place, however poor, in London, where a demoiselle may live for a short time until she gets a place, you will add still more to that deep debt of gratitude which I can never pay—which I would rather not pay.”

“A governess?—well—well—” said my father uneasily. “Yes, we might find you a place. But what do you say, wife?”

“I say that Mdlle. de Comarmond must stay a little longer with us, and get strong first. We will talk about business afterwards.”

“Ah, madame, you are too kind. See, now, I am very clever. I know English, oh! a little—a very little. But I am quick, I shall soon know it well. I play the piano, I play the harp, I sing, I draw, I paint—oh, I am very clever! I shall make an excellent *institutrice*. But you are too kind, madame.”

So, without more words, mademoiselle stayed with us. She made rapid progress in her English. She had been taught to read, but, of course, in her out-of-the-way convent, had not the most rudimentary idea of speaking, English—her accent being, at first, something atrocious. But she insisted

on our talking as if she understood every word; and in a few weeks grew to comprehend most things, and to express her own ideas with tolerable fluency.

The thing that most struck me about this French girl was her extraordinary fragility of appearance. She seemed to be almost ethereal. Hands of the tiniest—mere child's hands, only the fingers were so thin and long; a wrist which seemed incapable of bearing the slightest burden; and tiny feet—when you came to see them, which was not often, for mademoiselle was jealous of her charms—like Chinese feet for smallness, though not for shape: all her ways, too, gentle and delicate, as if anything rough and uncouth was positively unknown to her. And, as she recovered gradually from the long shock of her illness, and her features filled up, we—or at least one of us—began to notice her wonderful beauty. It was not the ordinary beauty of a Frenchwoman—that much-maligned creature of incomparable grace, who is accused of having no beauty—nor was it the beauty of an Italian, far less of a German, type. It seemed almost as if on one of the noblest stocks of France had been grafted the gipsy blood. I know not why I thought so, because she was of a perfect whiteness. Her eyes, black and full, had a sort of Eastern limpidness, something like that of the Syrian almond eye; the lashes were long, and she had a trick of half-shutting the lids, and lazily looking at things through her drooping lashes. To my mother, who had no companion, the presence of this girl brought an inexpressible and daily increasing source of comfort, for she had the power of divining what ought to be done, and what ought to be said. Never for a moment servile, she yet paid her patrons for their kindness with a thousand little daily acts of attention and consideration. She read to my father; she went about the house with my mother, and helped her in all sort of ways; and in the evening played to us. Ah, heavens! how she played!—with what passion, with what depth and intensity of emotion, till the keys spoke, and sang their "*Lieder ohne Worte*" better than if Swinburne had set verses to them. Or sometimes—but not often, because her singing was not so good as her playing—

she sang little French songs, of a light and innocent kind, such things as they teach girls in convents, like the mildest and most harmless champagne. As for the question of her departure, it was put off altogether—postponed *sine die* by tacit consent; and she became part of ourselves.

It was in the end of November, on one of these late autumn days which belie the evil character given to this month, that, as I was strolling back home, after going into the town, I saw her tripping lightly out of the house, dressed in her usual neat and unpretending style, and looking a hundred times better dressed than half the women one meets in the Park.

"It is you, Monsieur Edward? I am going to post madame's letters, and to buy some ribbons."

"Come for a walk with me, instead. I will post the letters for you, and the ribbons will wait."

She hesitated a moment, and then turned back with me, prattling in her pretty way of all things under heaven and on earth.

We passed on beyond the last houses to the north of Deal beyond Sandown Castle, and came to the old pathway called the Sand Hills, which lies between Sandwich and Deal, and is a short cut. This leads away from the beach; and we followed it, in perfect unconcern whither it might take us.

It is a wild, desolate pathway. Scarcely any one walks along it by day or night. Merely a track, marked by feet of occasional wayfarers. On the right, the mounds of grass-grown sand which have given it its name. Climb over them, and you will see a scene of desolation stretching to the sea, like the Wilderness of Judah, where, mound after mound, the sand-hills rise and fall; on the left, a ditch overgrown with duckweed and marsh mallow, where occasionally you see a water-rat hurrying into his amphibious home somewhere in the banks.

Gradually, the influences of the wild place seemed to sober my companion. She walked in silence, glancing curiously from side to side, and with eyes that seemed looking at something in the far distance, as one who sits and thinks

he sees some place miles away, where he has not been for many a year.

I, too, became silent ; and we strolled along, saying nothing to each other. Presently, on the edge of the ditch, we came to a stone which I never remembered to have seen there before. It was the size of an ordinary milestone, square-shaped, and had an inscription on it :—

HERE MARY BAX WAS
MURDERED BY MICHAEL LARK,
SEAMAN AND FOREIGNER,
SEPT. 26, 1767.
HE WAS AFTERWARDS HANGED FOR THE
OFFENCE.

I read it aloud, and shuddered. My companion read it, and turned pale.

“An awful place for a murder,” I said, looking round. “A wild, desolate place—the spot which a murderer would choose. Can we not fancy him bringing his victim out here on that quiet September night, far away from any house, and then deliberately doing her to death? See, he would hide her body in the ditch ; then wash his hands, and go away again. How was he found out? Murder is always found out, you know. But, mademoiselle, in Heaven’s name, what is the matter?”

If she was pale before, she was ghastly now. Her lips were white, her brow studded with drops that seemed wrung out in agony ; her eyes—those beautiful limpid eyes—strained with a fearful expression of misery, pain, and expectation ; her hands held out before her, palms downward, in an attitude of the most miserable despair.

“Mademoiselle, what is it?”

She fell fainting towards me. I caught her up as she fell, and laid her on the grass. Then, although the water in the ditch looked foul and muddy, it was better than nothing, and I filled my hat with it, and sprinkled her face and forehead. In a moment she recovered and sat upright.

“Ah!” she said, “I suppose I have walked too far. I am

not strong, you know. Wait a moment, and I shall be well again."

She turned her head and read the inscription again.

"Ah, miserable stone!" she said, with a faint smile; "you have frightened me, you and your inscription—and you, Monsieur Edward, who wanted to draw a picture of the horrible murder. Come, let us run away and leave it!"

She walked back with a sort of feverish activity, and talking incessantly; only I fancied she talked too quickly. Evidently, she was not well. I had overtaken her strength. As we reached the house, she said to me, with more emphasis than was necessary for so simple a request—

"Promise me, Monsieur Edward, that you will not say a word to madame about this wretched fainting fit of mine. She is so kind that she will be frightened."

Of course I promised.

That night she did not come down to dinner, having a headache; and the whole of the next day kept her room.

The following day, I found her sitting in the little room which was my mother's favourite, which looked upon the sea, and was fitted with rose-coloured curtains, her pet colour—and, for the matter of that, Adrienne's too. Did I say that I had got in the habit of thinking of her as Adrienne? Perhaps it was from hearing my mother call her so. The General always called her his "little ally," and used to make little jokes about the *entente cordiale*. But then his generalship, and his acquaintance with the French too, dated back to the Crimean war. He has been spared, poor old man, the agony and humiliation of seeing his old comrades in the field despoiled and conquered—made to sign a treaty more greedy and grasping on the part of the conquerors, more barbarous, more pitiless, than anything since the days of Brennus, while England looked on and said nothing.

She was sitting on the sofa reading, with the warm rose light falling full upon her face. I never saw her look so lovely. My heart gave a great leap, and my throat seemed to swell and prevent me from speaking as I looked at her.

She raised her eyes and smiled. I could bear it no longer.

I was only five-and-twenty, which is some excuse. I threw myself down at her feet, and seized her hands, crying, in broken tones—

“Adrienne—my own Adrienne, I love you. It is I whose stupid folly made you suffer—my poor fragile, sensitive child. Forgive me, for I love you.”

She let her hands lie in mine for a moment, and then withdrew them gently.

“Forgive you,” she said, “why not? What is there to forgive?”

“But I said more, Adrienne. I said I loved you.”

“In my country, people only say that when they are married.”

“But we are in England now. Ah, dearest, bear with me—hear me plead my own love.”

Did I love her? Even now I cannot answer that question. For five years I have been trying to find out whether I really loved her, or whether it was only the passing fancy of a man for the beauty of a woman, in her case heightened by all the circumstances connected with her—the wreck, the lifeboat, my own share in her rescue, her own fragility of appearance. We may fall in love a hundred times. There is no period between eighteen and eight-and-forty when there is not a possible wife among our acquaintance. But real love, or what we read of, I do not know. If ever I felt it, it was that moment when I knelt at her feet, while she lay upon the couch, and I longed with all the strength of my soul to fold her in my arms, and feed my hungry heart with kisses.

“Monsieur Edward,” she said, “would it not be a dishonourable thing for me to listen to you? See, I am a poor girl. I am living here on the bounty of your parents. Nay, go away, be silent—I cannot listen.”

“But if they gave consent—if then, my Adrienne?”

“Alas!” she murmured, “they will not.”

I snatched her hand again and kissed it, and left her.

I went straight to my father, and told him my story. By great good luck, he was that day entirely free from gout. He wagged his head from side to side for five minutes, and then

nodded it up and down for five minutes more. This was his way of turning the matter over in all its lights. Then he said he would think over it. That meant he would go by my mother's decision.

I went to her and pleaded, not in vain; for my mother was more in love with Adrienne than any of us.

"Why not, Edward? She is a Catholic, I suppose; but we may get over that in time. She is a lady. She is good. She is accomplished. Really, my son, if I were to choose your wife for you myself, even the jealous eye of your mother could find you no better wife than my dear Adrienne."

Adrienne was a Catholic, but a liberal one; and the religious difficulty was got over at once, and by half an hour's discussion with my father. I heard them discussing with open doors—that is, I heard my father banging a book on the table, and stating with emphasis and clearness the more evident points in the Bible by which the Pope and his adherents may be brought to shame and confusion. And presently he emerged, announcing to me that the last barriers were overcome, and Adrienne was prepared to become an Anglican. I think that even the memory of Inkerman did not rejoice him so much as this triumph; and the poor old man ever after regarded the girl with a peculiar affection, as one saved from the errors of a straying Church through his own humble instrumentality.

Why linger over a time which is, to me above all, a bitter time to look back upon? I am sorry I began my story at all, because of the bitter pain of finishing it. We left Deal at the end of November, and returned to our own place in Hertfordshire. I went up to town, got called, made the usual arrangements common to young barristers who have not the smallest reason for expecting any practice—*i.e.*, took chambers for the transaction of as much work as Sir Roundell Palmer has to do—announced my approaching marriage, and then went down into the country, not to leave it again till I brought away my bride. It was arranged that we were to be married at the New Year.

I got down to Boughton Hall a fortnight before Christmas.

It was glorious weather—frosty, cold, bright. We had a little skating and plenty of walking. Adrienne did not care much about going out; so our own house was filled with people night after night, and we had impromptu dances, charades, and private theatricals. And then I found another accomplishment in my *fiancée*, for she was an accomplished actress. To please her we performed little French pieces—the proverbs of Alfred de Musset, and those light and airy sketches where everything depends upon the acting. I daresay our own performances were bad enough—at least, my father was never tired of laughing at our accent; but Adrienne carried us through, and even at times inspired us with the power of acting, through the mere contagion of her own enthusiasm. And she seemed happy, too. The old fits of sadness, which had been wont to come over her, sometimes for days together, vanished altogether. To myself she was ever the same, cold and undemonstrative and unresisting. I might play with her delicate fingers, and run my hand through her hair as we sat together. I might kiss her cheek, if I pleased. I might call her all endearing epithets. She only seemed to yield. I thought little of her coldness at the time, which seemed to me maiden modesty. Afterwards it helped to explain a great deal. And myself? I cannot understand, as I have said, my own feelings. I regarded her with an intensity of admiration which I can never again feel for another woman. For there does not, I believe, exist a woman in the world so bright, so ready to understand, so full of tact. But while I lavished my caresses upon her, and persuaded myself that I was madly in love with her, there was yet altogether wanting that softening of the heart at the very sound of her name, that trembling at her presence, which belongs to a young man's first love. I was not—I think I could not have been—really in love with her. I was only dreaming of love. I was enchanted with her presence. I remember, one evening, we were reading poetry. I read to her Coleridge's most exquisite poem, "Genevieve." When I had read the verses, I looked up at her. There was no emotion in her eyes, which met mine with her cold and lustrous look! and for the moment my heart fell. But no

misgivings on my part—none; no disloyalty to the pledge of my heart; no shaking of my faith. Adrienne was mine, and I was hers. We were to be one. Little by little the petals of that sweet and delicate blossom of love would unfold her, till I should have the full flower—an immortal rose of Jericho. By degrees, I thought, I should learn to read all the secret workings of an entirely pure and unsullied page, a maiden's mind; until the *rapprochement* between us should be the most mystical and wonderful, the perfect union of two souls, wrought by the power of wedded love.

Alas! alas!—dreams—dreams—doomed to be shattered and destroyed.

On Christmas Eve we sat, we and our guests, round the big fire in the great hall, talking, and singing, and drinking punch, after the good old English fashion, which my father would not alter. He sat on one side in his great arm-chair. At his feet lay Adrienne, her head upon his knees, his hand in her hair, and caressing her smooth cheek. My mother was opposite. I, my heart full of happiness, next her. My father had been telling some stories of his Crimean campaign. He loved to talk of the war where he had won his rank and his title, especially to Adrienne, before whom he dilated upon the bravery of our gallant allies, and the friendships he had formed among them; and presently twelve o'clock struck.

"It is Christmas Day," said my father. "God bless us, every one! Only a week now, my children, and you will be a married pair. I pray that you may be as happy as your mother and I."

The tears came into his eyes, as he spoke with a full heart. Our guests were all old friends, before whom he could speak unreservedly.

"Wedded life," he went on, after a pause, "is the only happy life. Edward, you do well to marry young. I could not. I was obliged to wait till I was thirty-five. I am not going to tell anybody how old you were, mamma."

"Indeed, you may," said my mother. "I was past thirty when we married. The bloom was off my youth."

"You are always beautiful, my dear," said the General.

"God has been very good to us, my friends. I am not so thankful as I ought to be. Truly, we have been spared all trouble: no sadness has come to my home—no disgrace to any of mine—no evil has fallen upon us."

That night, how well I remember it, and the General's last words of thanksgiving because no evil had fallen upon us!

The evil was even then fallen, but we knew it not. That was reserved for the morning.

It was after church. Adrienne and myself were sitting alone by the fireside. Her hand was in mine: and, in perfect happiness, I sat silent.

There was the sound of wheels as a carriage drove up to the door, and in a few moments the servant opened the door, and gave me a card with the name of John Probyn written upon it.

"Who is Mr. John Probyn?" I asked.

The question had no answer, for the owner of the card, a tall, strong-looking man, followed the servant into the room.

Adrienne rose to go.

"Pray don't go, mademoiselle," said our visitor; "I have most particular and private business, in which your presence is necessary."

She sat down without saying a word, carelessly. I motioned the stranger to a seat.

"Perhaps," he said, "you will excuse my locking the door. My business is of a most painful nature."

What could it be? I stared at him.

He put his hand in his pocket, and pulled out a paper.

"I am very sorry, Mr. —, most sorry. Prepare yourself for the most terrible thing that can happen to you."

Adrienne was lividly white—white as when I laid her on the grass beside the murderer's stone at Deal; and her hands were shaking in her lap, as she tried vainly to look unconcerned.

"Terrible thing! What terrible thing? Speak, man!" I cried.

"I must do my business at once," said he. "Cruelty is the best kindness."

He made a step towards Adrienne, and called her by a new name—

"Amélie Clairet."

She sat motionless, save for the trembling of her lips.

"Amélie Clairet, you know why I am here."

She rose, putting her hand in her pocket. I noticed the gesture. The man was looking at me.

Then she came to me, and put her hand upon my shoulder.

"My friend—you will let me have a few words with him, will you not, Mr. Probyn? In your presence—oh! *bien entendu*—my friend, when your father thanked God last night that no evil thing had ever happened to him or his, I prayed solemnly that should the evil thing I feared come upon him, it might come before next week. I thank God, now, that my prayer is answered. I am not Adrienne de Comarmond at all. I am Amélie Clairet, an actress—Amélie Clairet, a murderess!"

"My lips parted, but I could not speak.

"I invented my lies to save myself. But I always knew I should be found out. The rest I could not help. If only you had not fallen in love with me, all would have been well; for it would not then have mattered."

She let go my shoulder, and staggered to a seat. There was a tumbler and water on the table. Mr. Probyn poured out a glass, and gave it her. In a moment she went on again.

"Amélie Clairet, the murderess. I will tell you about it. You shall know the whole truth, and then you may hate me if you will. I cannot undo the past.

"I was young, and he loved me—my bright, my handsome, my darling Alfred. He was a gentleman, and I was not a lady. He could never marry me. What did I care? Marriage! Pah! It was invented by priests to make themselves strong. My father always said so. We loved each other, and we were happy. He was an officer in a cavalry regiment, Ah! mon Dieu! mon Dieu! how happy was I!

"He used to come and see me act every evening, with his brother officers. I always acted better when they were there.

There is nothing I would not have done for the dear old regiment to which he belonged. I knew every officer in it, and all their stories—every sergeant—almost every man, and they all knew me. Ask them, if you will, what they would not have done for Mademoiselle Clairot, the actress.

“There’s something wrong in this world—something that might be set right—something that prevents people from being happy. It is with everybody—even, you see, Monsieur Edward, with that poor old man, that good man, that kind and brave man, your father. Alas! that he should ever have met with me. It was so with me. We were stationed—I mean the regiment was stationed—at Lyons. There was a young *avocat* who was in love with me. Why, I do not know. He threw bouquets for me on the stage. He sent me letters; he sent me fruit and flowers to my lodgings. At last he called himself one day. He threw himself at my feet and begged me to marry him. He was ready to go anywhere, and do anything—to sacrifice all for my sake. I laughed at him—in the abundance of my happiness I laughed at him. Then he rose to his feet and called me names—called me a coquette, a heartless actress, and so on. I laughed the louder. Then he went away from me. I laughed again. At the theatre that night people looked at me earnestly, my colleagues whispered among each other; but no one told me anything.

“Next day I was not at the theatre at all; for the lawyer had gone straight from me to a *café*, and met my lover—my Alfred—and insulted him. They fought at daybreak, and with pistols; and my Alfred was lying, when I ought to have appeared on the stage, dead upon his bed; and I standing beside him, swearing, on his pale cold lips, that I would avenge his death.

“That was last May. All this has happened, you see, within a year. I had a little money, and I left the stage; but I did not leave my plan of revenge. That I nursed and watched, while it grew and grew in my brain, and became ever a deeper purpose.

“I kept myself informed of my *avocat’s* doings. He never

saw me, and I suppose had forgotten my existence. I bought a revolver, and learned how to use it; but I waited my time.

"In September he went north, to Normandy, with his wife. I forgot to say that he was married. Yes; this made it the better for me, you see, because the revenge would be the greater. I went, too, disguised, like an actress as I am, so that even he should not recognise me. Then, in that quiet little place by the seaside, I sat and watched.

"One evening—it was September the 26th, 1867, this very year—exactly one hundred years after that murder was done at Deal, Monsieur Edward—now you know why I turned pale and fainted—I saw him walking along the sands, away from the town. It was a lonely walk; no one ever passed along that way. It was a wild and desolate place that the walk led to; not a heath, like that place at Deal, but a cliff, up which the path climbed, and then passed along the edge, lonely and deserted. I put on my hat, and took my pistol, and followed.

"For half an hour he strolled leisurely along, smoking a cigar—I a hundred yards behind him. Then he stopped, and after looking out at the sea for a few moments, turned idly back. I tore off my false hair, and stood before him in the path.

"*'Mademoiselle Clairet!'* he gasped.

"*'I am Amélie Clairet,'* I said. *'You remember, monsieur, that morning, four months ago, when you stood by the riverside, above my lover's dead body?'*

"*'Mademoiselle has no right to reproach me with that fatal accident. I deplore it greatly.'*

"*'Murderer! whose was the insult? Whose fault was it that the duel took place?'*

"*'At least, we had an equal chance. I risked my life.'*

"*'Yes, you risked yours to take his. You risked yours to revenge yourself on me. You staked your life against my happiness, and you won the stake; but it is my turn now!'*

"I raised my hand, and fired. I missed. He rushed upon me. I steadied my nerves, and when he was only a few feet from me—when I could almost feel his hot breath upon my

face, and could see the wild fear in his eyes—I fired again. He fell, and never spoke. To make my vengeance sure, I fired the other four chambers into him.

“Then I walked down the cliff, and made my way back to Paris. I wrote to an officer of the regiment—my regiment—and told him what I had done. He came to Paris, and hid me for a time. Then, because he could hide me no longer, he brought me to the coast; and on that day in October, when you saved me, he put me in the little vessel that was wrecked. Now you know all.

“I am sorry,” she said, bursting into tears—she had kept dry-eyed while she told the tale—“I am sorry—oh! so sorry, for the General, and madame, and you—oh, so very, very sorry! Tell me that you forgive me, Monsieur Edward, tell me that you forgive me! What could I do otherwise? O mon Dieu! what could I have done? Forgive me!”

She knelt at my feet. I could not answer, but by a sigh. I raised her up, and kissed her. As I kissed her, her forehead became cold—ice-cold. She stood erect for a moment; from her hand there fell a little bottle, which broke upon the floor—she had not touched it—and then, in a moment—I hardly saw her fall, because my eyes were dimmed—she lay upon the carpet, dead.

Her heart was broken long before. The misery of remorse—the dread of detection had broken it; and then the sudden shock came, and it ceased to beat.

Shall I go on? The General and my mother never knew. That Mr. Probyn was with us on law business connected with me was stated by that good fellow himself, who perjured himself at the inquest, with the most complete readiness, to save us pain. We buried her in the country churchyard, in our own family vault. My broken-hearted father followed her a short year afterwards: and the dreadful secret is mine alone.

EDELWEIS.

A TALE OF 1776.

“Look up above, where blooming fair
Amid the mountains bleak and high,
Yon snowy tuft the storm defies—
It is the much-loved Edelweis !”

[My story takes its title from that greatly prized and lovely plant, the edelweis, which is found only on the highest and most inaccessible parts of the Tyrolese and Bavarian Mountains. Its name signifies “noble purity,” and from time immemorial the dwellers among the hills on which it grows have held it as the best gift that a lover can make to the maiden of his choice. Too frequently, in the unwritten folklore of those simple mountaineers, do stories recur that tell the tale of the young jäger found cold in death at the foot of the crag from which he had plucked the edelweis, the snowy tuft for which he had sacrificed his life clasped in the last unbending grasp of his lifeless hand.]

BRITZEN in the Tyrol, just a hundred years ago. Britzen very busy, in a mighty bustle and fume and ferment. For what should all the village quit its humdrum ways sooner than to do fitting honour to its greatest man, mayor, and innkeeper, Emanuel Neuermarkt? And for what greater festival should the villagers keep their flowers and huzzas than the wedding of the mayor’s daughters, Lotta and Margaret?

The day was yet young—for Britzen was always an early place—when the farmers and proprietors called with their wives on the innkeeper to enjoy the hospitality that awaited them, and wish him joy of the happy day; and their sons and daughters they brought with them to follow Lotta and Margaret to the chapel on the hillside. For with them the order of affairs at a wedding was the reverse of our practice. They met at the house of the bride’s father, and ate their breakfast first to strengthen their stomachs for the visit to

the church that followed—though, for the matter of that, feasting was kept up all the day after. Emanuel Neuermarkt was not the man to set a bad example to the people of his township on such an occasion. Dressed in his best flap-hat and jerkin and buckskin breeches, he sat in the best room of the Boar's Head, with good Dame Margaret, his spouse, in her clean linen frills, by his side; and heartily the honest couple bade welcome to all who came in, wishing them God-speed and good luck that day. The visitors bidden to the feast were those of their own rank in life, owners of flocks and herds—the notary, the doctor, and the priest; and for them the guest-room was strewn with clean, faint-smelling rushes, and the tables spread with good cheer on Dame Margaret's lily-white homespun napery. But Emanuel had by no means forgotten his poorer neighbours, and his maids and his drawer had orders to let no man pay for bite or sup at the sign of the Boar's Head, in Britzen, that day; but let the stout brown beer and the good red wine flow for all that came to the wedding of his daughters, Margaret and Lotta.

So, already, in the great kitchen of the inn, made warm by the iron oven in the wall—for though it was but early autumn, the weather was stormy and cold—a goodly company of callers kept looking in, to begin the day well with huge draughts of the mayor's home-brewed beer. Old men there were who remembered the day when Emanuel Neuermarkt himself was wed, three and twenty years gone by, and young fellows who wished they stood in the lucky bridegrooms' shoes that day; for Lotta and Margaret were well known for the comeliest lasses for miles around, and their dowry—well, opinions differed; but all put it down at a high figure, for the mayor had been known for a warm man this many a year. And one thing all wished, young and old—good luck to the brides and bridegrooms, and that every man in Britzen was as rich as Emanuel Neuermarkt, inn-keeper and mayor.

The sight of the inn kitchen was enough to make them envious that day: the stores of all sorts of provisions, the hams and bacon, the smoked geese and ducks, the goat's-milk

cheeses, the ropes of onions, and bags of meal; and down the three cellar steps such an array of barrels and hogsheads as brought tears into every toper's eyes—for it was ten o'clock in the morning then, and at twelve at night the feasting would be over. So they began to stuff and swill at once, and nearly ran poor Fritz the drawer off his legs to fill their flagons fast enough.

"The Lord be praised," said he, as he came out of the cellar with a great can of beer, "that our daughters are not married every day!" Then, fearing he had said something unlucky, he added, looking up at the smoked geese and hams—"Though may Heaven forgive me for saying that same, for they are both good girls, and not slow in saying a good word to all, gentle and simple, though they are their father's only children."

"And one shall have the Boar's Head some day," said a voice over a foaming cup—"though far off be the day, say I; for we like good Master Neuermarkt well."

"Ay, ay," said a young peasant—who in an English village would have been a poacher, but here confined his pilferings to less debatable property—"he's a right good mayor, and here's his health!" (emptying his cup). "Now I mark it, there's only been three men in the stocks this year, and never a one in gaol."

"If there's a rotten stick in the fence it aye cracks first," said an old man. "Master Max shouldn't speak o' the stocks, that shouldn't he; for if never a man in Britzen but three's been in 'em this year, Master Max, I trow, 's been in 'em, arms and legs, more than three times this year."

The face of Max grew black at this speech, and in a corner of the kitchen two gossips whispered—

"And if never a one's been in gaol, some deserved to go. Who but Max had our brown goat?"

"And my three speckled fowls?"

"Ay, ay!"

But if in the kitchen of the Boar's Head all was feasting and jollity, in the guest-room, as the clumsy hands of the

great wooden-cased clock moved on with certain strides nearer and nearer towards noon, the hearts of Master Emanuel and his dame grew heavier and heavier with every tick of the slow pendulum.

And in their little chamber in the thatched roof, Margaret was in tears, while Lotta tried in vain—with six other young friends in white and rose-coloured ribands—to wear a smile and cheer her sister.

Wilhelm Dorno, the miller's son, was Lotta's bridegroom; and he was, with his father and mother and three stout brothers, in the room below, waiting to take his sweetheart to the chapel of Saint Cecilia on the hill.

But where was Carl Lütbeck, Margaret's bridegroom? What kept him away? It was no fear of his constancy to his true love these three years that made Margaret's gentle eyes well over with scalding tears.

She cried so piteously over the bridal dress she would not suffer her bridesmaids to put on her, because she feared some accident had befallen her beloved Carl, in his long journey from München. She had had a dream. She accepted the ill omen, and with true womanly obstinacy refused to be comforted. So she wept, and her companions tried in vain to cheer her.

"Don't fret and fidget, good wife," old Neuermarkt said. "Carl will be here in time, depend on it. There's a good hour for him yet."

"Ay," said old Dorno the miller, "he's a brave lad—with his pistols in his saddle, I'll wager my life—and the road from München is all good road, though it's many a long mile to come; and he's got company too—Albrecht will be with him."

The notary, who sat at the oak table in the window, with his papers ready to be signed, spread them out, took his horn spying-glass from his pocket, and scanned the fair parchments afresh.

"What say you, Master Notary?" asked Dame Neuermarkt. "It's ill luck," she sighed, "putting off a wedding-day, even if nothing has happened the lad—which the

Virgin and all the saints forbid, for 'twould break my poor Margaret's heart!" And she reverently crossed herself.

"Thou'rt like her—soft-hearted dame. Margaret was always her mother's chick." And the worthy man tried to laugh, as much to cheer himself as the rest.

Then in a little cracked voice the notary spoke—

"Let us give every circumstance due attention," he said. "Carl and Albrecht Lütbeck were to have been here yesterday. They had two days' ride of it from München. They are lads of good business habits, as young cloth merchants should be. Some bargain or sale may have kept them, and so delayed their start. Again, a horse may have fallen lame, or cast a shoe, leagues from a farrier's. They must lead the lame steed at footpace to an inn, and every village has not got an hostelry like the Boar's Head, where a change of horses can always be got——"

"Ay, ay, the notary speaks well, dame," said the innkeeper. "I expect a horse has fallen lame. The poor beasts always do when you want them sound."

"But sure the other would have galloped on to tell us, or sent us a message; for this sad fright is killing my poor girl. We can but wait and hope. The blessed saints aid and keep the poor lads!" ejaculated the innkeeper's wife piously.

And all the women crossed themselves.

So the time passed too slowly and too fast. The suspense was hard to bear. Some of the guests rose, and said they would walk to the top of the town, and see if they could hear anything of the young men. The others stayed, and tried to cheer their host and Dame Neuermarkt. Poor Margaret lay, faint and sick, in her chamber, and was altogether beyond the doctor's skill. There was, out of the pharmacopœia, only one medicine that could cure her. It was called Carl. As she woke from her fainting fits, Carl's name was upon her lips, Carl's image in her heart.

"O Carl, Carl!—my Carl is dead—dead!"

This was all they got from her.

It wanted a quarter of twelve by the sun-dial on the green

opposite the inn, and twenty minutes by the clock in the parlour, when young Dorno came racing in, breathless with excitement and haste.

"Here they come—here they come, in a postchaise! We could see it from the top of the hill."

You may guess how every face brightened at this news.

"There, dame—I told you so," said the innkeeper. "I say, dame, put the clock back a quarter or so. Time's never o' much matter at Britzen—eh, neighbours? We fixed twelve to be at the chapel. We can walk it in a quarter of an hour comfortably."

He had scarcely spoken when the wheels of a chaise were heard rolling down the village street.

"My word!" said old Dorno. "What a pace they come at! It might be the King's coach, for the rattle."

"He drives fast who drives for life, Master Dorno—or, for the matter o' that, for a wife either."

Headed by Neuermarkt, they all rushed out in a posse to welcome Carl and Albrecht, while you might have counted near twenty heads with caps on at the windows in the long roof.

"Da ist das Wirthshaus," cried a military-looking man inside.

"That's not Carl's voice. Oh, my poor girl!" sobbed Dame Neuermarkt; and she turned faint, and fell into the miller's arms.

They were two officers in the chaise, posting from München to Trient.

Had they seen two young men on their way?

Carl and Albrecht Lütbeck were described in a dozen different ways at once, by a dozen eager voices.

At Innspruck they had slept at the same Wirthshaus.

Last night, some ten leagues back on the road, they had seen two horses, riderless, start out of the forest, cross the road, and lose themselves again in the pines.

"Then," said Master Neuermarkt, almost beside himself with fear and alarm, "neighbours, there will be no wedding to-day. Lotta and Wilhelm can't go to church without my

poor Margaret and Carl. Ah, me! gentlemen, the day that was to be our happiest is our saddest. It's but poor entertainment we can offer you at the Boar's Head."

But Dorno the miller was of a practical, soldier-like mind. He took the command when his old friend was unequal to it.

"Go, one of you, to the priest, and tell him," said he. "And now let every one of you that has a horse to ride, or legs to carry him, bring meat and wine in his wallet, his fowling-piece and his lantern; and let us start and find out the truth."

"If you will horse us," said the two officers, "we will lead you to the spot where we saw the two nags gallop through the woods."

Two short-legged mountain cobs were soon found; and in less than an hour, with the soldiers and Dorno, the miller, at its head, the expedition to find Carl and Albrecht started, followed by the prayers and old shoes of all the village.

II.

AT three o'clock the day before, in the afternoon, the brothers Lütbeck were riding along, at a steady pace, on two as good nags as ever stout legs crossed. Their path lay over mountains and through forests, in which wild game was plentiful; though, in the gloomy pines, they could see nothing twenty yards from their horses' heads, so thick was the canopy of branches overhead. But the roadway was clear and light. There would be darkness from seven till ten. Then the moon would be high enough to light them to Margaret and Britzen. They had but nine leagues to compass. Their horses were fresh; their riders light-hearted, singing and talking as they trotted along the sandy road, or cantered over the mossy turf by the side of the carriage track. They knew the way well from München to Britzen, for they had been over it a hundred times. As they neared their journey's end, familiar hills and dales made Carl's heart leap for joy. It was three months since he had seen

his love, and only three letters had passed between the betrothed pair in that time.

"But nine short leagues between thee and thine, brother," said Albrecht, as they emerged into the open after three leagues of forest. "Dost thou not wish thou couldst fly to thy mate, like yonder dove to his?"

Carl rode on in silence.

"She will make thee the best wife in the world," Albrecht went on. "And won't all Britzen envy her the chatelaine thou takest her, that came all the way from Paris!"

"I know something Margaret would like better," said Carl; "for the girl always liked things simple better than costly goods."

"Thyself!" said his brother, laughing. "Thou'rt simple enough, in all conscience, Carl; and hast been since first thou wert in love."

"I mean a bunch of edelweis, Albrecht. It is always the lover's best gift. The hills we're among now have more of it than those about Britzen. I'd give ten good gold pieces to hold a tuft in my hand this minute."

They rode on a league—Albrecht's keen eye looking all about him for a likely spot for the fragile flower to be found upon. Their road lay over a mountain path, with steep crags towering above their heads on one side, on the other the black forest of pines.

"Why should we not try to find and gather a bunch of edelweis for Margaret's hair to-morrow? It is but a year or two since we thought nothing of climbing such a crag as this," said Albrecht, striking the perpendicular rock with the butt end of his whip. But Carl said they had better push on. His heart was already at the Boar's Head in Britzen.

"Nay, why not?" Albrecht persisted. "Look where the sun is. It is but three o'clock by the day. Let us tie our horses to this white ash, climb these crags, and before the sun is four quarters nearer his bed, you shall have a hatful of the lover's flowers; for—

'Where low the white ash grows,
On high the edelweis blows.'

Come, here goes for one!" And the young man threw himself from his horse, and, before Carl had time to remonstrate with him, he had tied the bridle in a knot round one of the branches of the white ash.

His brother rode on a few yards; then turned his horse round, and slowly dismounted.

"My heart forbids me hinder time in this schoolboy freak," he said; "but, Albrecht, since we were boys together thou hast always had thy way, so it must even be as thou wilt have it now, I suppose. Wait, my man, till thou hast a wife to rule thee."

But Albrecht was already busily occupied in scaling the precipitous ascent to the summit of the crag, where, his experience taught him, the flower would be found, if it grew on the rocks at all. Carl followed more slowly in the track of his impetuous brother, but a little wide of the path he took. It was hard work for both; but they were young and strong, and they managed to fit their toes into clefts and crevices, and hoist themselves from crag to crag by grasping the stunted brushwood, with the sureness of foothold and clutch gained by practice. They climbed like Zouaves. At last Albrecht reached the top and hallooed Carl with a shout of joy.

"Carl, man!"

"Hast found it?"

"Ay, here it is—we can fill thy hat with blooms."

With elastic step, Carl joined him, and they speedily stripped the rock of its prize; and felt no more giddy over their exploit, as they looked down at the horses in the ravine, than two eagles would have done.

"Remember, thou tellest Margaret 'twas her brother, not her husband, that found the flowers."

"This is an omen of good luck. I should have been a league nearer Britzen by this but for thee. I thank thee for making me halt."

"Now, for the getting down again," said Albrecht, as a piece of rock, detached by his foot, bounded over root and stump, till it reached the bottom and broke into a thousand pieces.

"Gently, there—be careful! So, not too fast," said the more cautious Carl.

They reached the bottom in safety with their precious booty; and the instant their feet touched the ground they saw in the narrow road, between them and their horses, a brown bear coming towards them at a comfortable jog-trot. There was something in the way he carried himself that showed he was a bear in search of a supper. Not a pleasant sight; but they had fought a bear before in honest chase.

Carl pulled Albrecht's coat, and pointed, to make sure he saw their danger.

"Opposite ways! Quick!—he does not see us," Carl whispered.

Instantly they separated, striking noiselessly into different paths. But if the bear did not see, he smelt Carl, and followed him as fast as four great legs could shamble.

Young Lütbeck put his hand to his belt. It grasped his powder-flask. His flint pistol hung harmlessly in the holster at his saddle-bow, a hundred yards away. He turned pale: the pallor of a brave man in mortal danger. He faced round. Albrecht was out of sight and danger. Thank God for that! He took one look at the great shaggy monster dogging him, and ran for Margaret Neuermarkt as hard as two sinewy legs every carried lithe body. But for the biped the way was rough, for the quadruped smooth; so the match was unequal, and the bear gained on him every second. He stumbled—was almost on his face on the ground. He felt the bear within a few paces of him. With one great effort he pulled himself together, dashed forward, and gained a gnarled and lightning-blasted oak. He climbed the trunk with the quickness of a squirrel, and for a moment had the best of the race for life. But the brown bear could climb too. He looked up with hungry, angry eyes at Carl, and followed.

Carl swarmed the highest of the long, leafless branches. It was a large limb, knotty on the surface, from which the bark had all peeled off, and was hollow inside.

Carl reached the extremity, and stuck one booted leg down the hollow part to keep himself from falling. The monster halted at the bottom of Carl's branch, and tried it carefully. Then he came circumspectly up towards his prey.

Ten years of his life—twenty—anything—everything, but life and Margaret—would Carl have given for his trusty flint pistol. The bear's muzzle touched him, and the bear's teeth felt very sharp through the leather of the boot that Carl could not now move. His other leg was stuck fast in the tree. The next thing, the great beast tore the toe of his boot off and part of the flesh of Carl Lütbeck's toes with it. The pain made him writhe. With his pocket-knife he made a dash at the beast's eyes; but the bear, with a stroke of his paw, sent the knife spinning through the branches of the tree.

"All the saints preserve me!" he cried, and gave himself up for a dead man, expecting to be eaten piecemeal, in rather large mouthfuls; and curiously wondering, at the same time, how long he should suffer pain after the bear had eaten the leg that dangled from the branch his other leg was stuck fast in.

But among the saints he prayed to, his patron saint must have heard him; for as the bear moved forward a single pace to make the work more easy, the happiest idea of Carl's life struck him.

He filled his hand with gunpowder from his flask, and threw it with all his force into the eyes of his foe. Instantly, with a shake of his head and a furious growl, the great beast descended to the main trunk of the tree.

Carl thanked Heaven, and invoked all the saints again. By the time he had done so, the bear was up his branch again, and ready to set on him with tenfold fury. As he seized Carl's foot, a second shower of gunpowder blinded him. He gave a great howl of pain and rage, and precipitately leaving the tree, trotted off again through the wood, frightening the horses out of their wits as he passed them, causing them to break their bridles and gallop off at a breakneck pace down the road.

When this was over, Carl's nerves gave way. With one foot bleeding fast, the other leg stuck tight in the tree, and Albrecht out of call, he fainted dead away.

III.

POOR Albrecht had run from their foe as hard as he could, without even looking round to see how Carl was faring. He took it for granted that, as the bear was not following him, he was not following his brother, but quietly pursuing the even tenour of his way along the high road to Innsbruck. So he hid away in a natural cleft in the rock for some twenty minutes; after which interval of time, feeling pretty certain the bear was a good mile on his way to Innsbruck, he stole cautiously back to the high road, and put first his nose and then his head over a great whin bush that overhung the way.

Seeing nothing to fear, he next ventured into the road, and looked about him. Then he called Carl in a low voice; then louder and louder, till "Carl—C-a-r-l!" rang back again from the rocks that skirted the road. Then his eye caught the ash on the bough of which the fragments of their horses' bridles hung, flapping to and fro in the wind.

"Ah! the bear went that way. The horses are gone. Carl must have gone that way, followed by the fierce pursuer. O Heaven! what has become of him?"

And Albrecht ran on as fast as he could, every step he took leaving poor Carl farther behind. He ran at the top of his speed as far as his strength allowed. At last, spent and weary with running, and shouting at intervals in the hope of making his brother hear, he reached a woodman's hut, where he sank exhausted. When he came to again, he found himself on a rude bed in the cottage, tended by a kind old woman. He told his tale, and never slept another wink; for the dame said his brother must have been eaten by the bear—escape was impossible! She enlivened his wakeful hours by telling him all the stories of people eaten by bears current in the neighbourhood.

Next day, in a desperate plight, the poor lad started to push his way afoot to the nearest town, where he could get a horse to carry him to Britzen. What a tale he had to tell when he got there! It would be the death of Margaret—perhaps of Lotta too. It was three hours past noon when he got a horse. An hour later he met the cavalcade that had left Britzen in search of the Lütbecks. He told his story, and all believed Carl dead, except the soldiers and the miller Dorno. Headed by their leaders, they all pushed on apace to the spot on the road where the young men had been confronted by the bear on the previous afternoon.

After a long search, and a great hallooing, they were answered by a faint voice. They found Carl still fast in the tree, and half dead from cold and stiffness.

And not a man Jack of them had saw or hatchet, but they gave him brandy while these were fetched from a house a league off.

It was dark when the little army reached Britzen. They were met at the entrance of the village by all those who had stayed behind.

“My Carl, my Carl!” shrieked a pale woman. “You bring him dead!” for she saw a cart in which a muffled form lay.

Carl’s voice answered. Carl placed in Margaret’s hands the bunch of flowers that had so nearly cost him his life.

The next day there was a double wedding in Britzen, for Margaret said—

“We must be wed before those holy blooms have time to fade.”

The soldiers stayed to do honour to the feast; and in proposing the health of the bridegrooms, old Pfortner, the priest, ended his speech with this verse:—

“Be this our holy, high ambition—
Whate’er our failings past and gone—
To rise above our sad condition,
Seek noble purity alone;
And, boldly mounting toward the skies,
Gain, e’en in death, our Edelweis.”

LOVE FINDS THE WAY.

THE flat greystone front of Haughmond Hall looked cheerless in the early dawn of a January morning in the year 1794. One bit of bright colour only broke the drab monotony of its upper story—the face of its master, that instant clean shaved in cold water, and now appearing, as rosy as aurora, at his open dressing-room window.

“Keep your hands down, boys,” he called out.

Five stable-boys, riding five promising four-year-olds at exercise in the park on the other side of the ha-ha, looked up at the Squire’s window together, touched the peaks of their caps together, and, skirting the lawn, trotted gently away under a clump of beeches, and so out of sight.

Mr. Haughmond went on with his toilet. By the time the horses came round again he had tied his long green-and-white-checked neckerchief twice or thrice round his full neck, and made a neat and sportsmanlike little bow under his chin.

“Take ’em on a bit faster,” was the Squire’s command. Five hands rose in acknowledgment of the head at the window, and five pairs of vigorous young heels at the same moment pressed their horses’ flanks. They disappeared behind the beeches at a smart pace, and the Squire put on his morning jacket.

“They’ll do,” he said, as the last pair of hind hoofs in the string was lost to view, and, drawing in his head from the window, he picked up his keys and money from the dressing-table, counting the latter with the air of a methodical man ; and then he warily dropped his cumbrous great gold repeater into his fob.

As he laid his hand on the heavy brass handle of his bedroom door, there came through the thick oak panels sounds of anxious scratching and whining on the other side, and directly a space of a few inches permitted, two white fox-terriers—prime favourites of their master—bounded into the room and wished him good morning as plainly as if they had spoken in the purest Saxon. While the Squire searched in the pockets of the clothes he had worn the evening before, the dogs sniffed about the room. The result of his search was a great letter, six inches square, rather the worse for the Squire's after-dinner custody, sealed on the obverse with the arms of the Elliots of Whitewell, and addressed on the reverse, in the somewhat boyish small-text hand of the heir of that house, to

“Miss GEORGIANA HAUGHMOND,
per favour of
GILBERT HAUGHMOND, Esq.”

Having straightened out the creases and put the corners right, the Squire, preceded by his terriers, went downstairs into the hall, where he stuck the letter in a prominent place in the letter-rack—a contrivance of sporting design which hung in the window to the right of the door, faced on the opposite shutter by a collection of seaweeds, and flanked by Mr. Haughmond's select library of twenty-one more or less useful and entertaining volumes, which reposed in well-dusted array in the window-seat. It was towards the window to the left of the hall-door that the Squire now directed his attention. Here, among his fishing-rods and guns, hung his weather-glass. This long-suffering piece of furniture came in for its usual morning allowance of thumps; after which, having thoroughly satisfied himself of the state of the weather, Squire Haughmond turned his steps towards his stable yard. As he takes a short cut through his shrubbery and kitchen-garden, let me say a word about him. First, he is a fox-hunter—an M.F.H. of five-and-twenty years' standing; secondly, he is a widower of fifty-five, blessed with an only child—Georgiana—whom he has brought up from

infancy with such slight assistance as was absolutely necessary from governesses; thirdly, he is a very red-faced elderly gentleman, to whom it is a great trouble that he seldom scales under sixteen stone. In politics he is a Tory. In religion he takes his nap in the family pew twice on every Sunday, from Advent to the last of the "after Trinitys." His views in relation to foreign affairs may be gathered from the remark he made when a nobleman of the country, who had hunted hounds badly for three or four seasons, was appointed to an important embassy, that "he was good for nothing else." In home affairs Mr. Haughmond was supremely satisfied with his own doings. Popular as a sportsman, passionate, but kind, as a master and landlord; as a magistrate; dealing out rough-and-ready justice; obstinate as a pig.

Squire Haughmond found his bosom friend, the Reverend Mr. Downes, vicar of the parish, and perpetual curate of Potcote as well, dismounting from a smart crop-tailed cob in the stable-yard.

The friends shook hands across the cob's broad back.

"Well, Squire."

"Well, parson."

"The wind shifted sou'-west as I was riding home last night. There'll be a heavenly scent to-day."

"It's the best scenting day we've had for a month, in my opinion. We shall have a run—mark me. I'm going to draw Windmill Gorse first, and I haven't drawn that blank six times in thirty years."

"My eye, how soon that bay's legs got right!" exclaimed the parson, critically scanning a great bright bay of the Squire's own breeding.

"My doctoring, Downes," explained the Squire, with a triumphant smile.

Having given his directions about the horses for the day's sport, Mr. Haughmond led the way to the kennels. At the end of a walk bordered on either side by high laurels was an ivied archway guarded by two stone foxes; behind it were the quarters of the pack. Here the Squire was in quite a

congenial element. His hounds were deserving of their widespread fame. Most of them he had bred from Lazarus a draft from the duke's, whose broad head the Squire now patted fondly, saying—

“One of the best dogs I ever cheered.”

“He is a made one!” cried the parson, caressing the old hound admiringly, while his friend went into the details of feeding with his head man, and personally superintended the mixing of a pudding for the pack.

“Come, then. How's your appetite?” said the Squire, when his labours were ended. “It's time to think about breakfast.”

“I'm your man,” was the ready response.

“Tell you what it is, Jack Downes, you fellows at Elliot's last night won more of me than I thought. I could not make my money right by half a guinea this morning.”

“I did not have it; I'll swear to that,” protested the parson.

“You won, though, I know. Never knew you to lose. You've the best luck of any man I ever knew, and I've the worst.”

“At cards, Squire. Only at cards.”

“At everything. Look here, now. Last week I lose a mare worth four hundred guineas, if she was worth a brass farthing, and her foal and all. And now, here's Georgy refuses when I put her at young Elliot. But she shall have him. I've made up my mind to that. I told the old boy so after you left last night. ‘Your son and my son-in-law,’ I said, clapping the young one on the back. I always have liked the Elliots. They're the right strain. The lad runs like a good straightforward fox that knows his country—bred in it—none of your Leadenhall bag gentlemen. Goes out of the room and writes it all out in black and white there and then. That's what I like; and I put the letter in my pocket. She shall have him.”

Talking in this strain, the two sportsmen found their way into the dining-room.

The Squire planted himself with his broad back to the

fire-place, in which the logs were just brightening to a blaze. Two greyhounds, who had long since said good-bye to slips and stakes, lay dozing on the hearth so comfortably that they hardly cared to lift an eyelid or wag a tail for their master. A pure-bred bulldog occupied the place of honour, and growled lazily at the terriers following closely on their master's heels. Everything about the place was pure, from a breeder's point of view. All the cats were black, the cocks were black-breasted reds, the bulls were the fathers of Coates's catalogue, the cart-horses were punches, and the hunters the progeny of well-tried winners over many a mile of emerald turf. Above the carved oak chimney-piece behind the Squire hung his portrait, presented by the members of his hunt. On the south, east, and west walls hung pictures of a celebrated greyhound, the interior of a cockpit, and a famous racehorse. There was one print in the room: it hung between the windows, and was the portrait of Sir Fregonwell Frampton, the father of the Turf, and erst keeper of the King's running horses. A trophy of foxes' heads and brushes, spurs, riding-whips, and hunting-horns, was fixed over the door, and a silver cup or two adorned the sideboard.

The table was laid for breakfast, and was spread with substantial fare. The parson seated himself one yard from the cloth, cut the tip off a tongue, pared it into slices of wafer-like thinness, and ate them meditatively.

The Squire reverted to the topic of young Elliot's proposal.

"She's as obstinate as a mule; but I'll let her see before I've done with her."

"Women are the doose," said the Reverend John Downes, who was a bachelor.

"They are; and so was her mother," said the Squire ungrammatically, and by way of response.

The parson poised a thin slice of the tongue on the point of his knife, and gave an assenting grunt.

"Look how that girl can ride!" continued the father; "what hands she's got; what an eye she's got; and what judgment! Haven't I brought her up to hounds ever since

she could say 'Forrard'? And what for, I should like to know. My 'First Whip.' I should like to see a man that's up to the work like she is."

"She's a clinker at her fences—any mortal thing. I love to see her take timber!" said the parson soothingly.

"She's my daughter, Downes," said the Squire. "And there's young Elliot," he added, "and everything that I've always made up my mind to. And the old man a little—a little——"

"Dicky on his forelegs," said his reverence feelingly.

"Ay! that's the word. We are all mortal: and his land marches field for field and fence for fence with mine, a good two mile and a half here, to say nothing of all the Killick property. But Georgiana runs quiet in double harness before this year's out, take my word for it, or my name's not Gilbert Haughmond."

"Girls are a 'nation deal of trouble. If I had had children I should have liked boys."

"So should I," said the Squire. "But I'm not tied. What's mine's my own, and I can leave my land to Dick Cutpurse if I like. No Wiltons shall ever have an inch of it. I don't know which I hate most, your skunk of a brother that I was fool enough to give my other living to, and then be beat by him at the assizes, or old Jack Wilton."

"They're a pretty pair of scoundrels," said the parson, in whom love of cards, foxhunting, and good eating outweighed fraternal affection—by tons.

"And it's that man's Mohock of a son that my daughter must gallop after full cry! Very pretty!"

Mr. Haughmond expressed what remained of his feeling upon this matter by pulling the bulldog's tail till he showed all his teeth.

The bell in the stable-yard had just done ringing for half-past eight. The dining-room door opened, and the butler made his appearance, carrying two large and foaming flagons of October, holding a good three pints each, one of which he set down before his master, and the other before Mr. Downes. He was followed by six or eight other servants, male and

female, with that drooping carriage and downcast expression which meant prayers a century ago, and means prayers now.

"Prayers?" said the parson.

"Yes, be hanged to 'em," said the Squire, referring, I am happy to say, not to the prayers—an institution of Church and State—but to the Wilton family. He took a comforting pull at the ale, and then composed himself in his easy-chair for devotion. On all hunting days—which at Haughmond Hall were three days a week from the 26th of July to the 3rd or 4th of May—the parson breakfasted with his friend the Squire. Advantage was accordingly taken on these mornings of the presence of a clergyman, and five minutes were devoted to a service which Mr. Haughmond persevered with as a duty,—irksome, perhaps, but still a duty incumbent on his station as a Squire, a Tory, and a Churchman.

Immediately after prayers Miss Haughmond, who seldom graced these week-day religious services with a personal attendance, made her appearance—a tall, fine country girl of twenty, with eyes as large as sloes and as dark, and plenteous tresses of hair black and glossy as the raven's wing. Beneath the subdued melancholy that properly distinguishes the young lady crossed in love, Miss Haughmond's features wore an expression of resolute courage and masculine determination—qualities she inherited from her father. She seated herself at the table, opposite him. After the usual interchange of salutations, breakfast proceeded in silence, broken only by the din of the weapons with which the Squire and the parson attacked the cold sirloin. In the way of liquids, there was October for the men and tea for the lady: the solids comprised beef, corned and roast, brawn, ham, tongue, and game pie. "Hungry as a hunter" is a proverb which applies as well to breakfast as to dinner. For generations your true foxhunter has enjoyed the rare privilege of waking with a keen appetite. Squire Haughmond and Parson Downes were no exceptions to this rule, and, as they had a long voyage before them, provisioned accordingly. When they had finished their meal, Mr. Haughmond turned his attention to his daughter.

"We shall have a pretty run to-day, Georgy; so cheer up, girl. Come with me into my room. I've some good news for you."

As they crossed the hall her father gave her the letter. It did not want woman's instinct to guess what it was.

Georgiana followed her father into his justice-room, where many a poacher had trembled in his shoes.

Now, Mr. Haughmond kept a diary, and his daughter, as well as being his first whip, was his amanuensis. The entries in the volume were short and pithy:—

"Took a bad guinea at Hexham Fair." "The skewbald fell with me." "William threw the skewbald down." "Windmill Gorse: lots of foxes; Clasher noisy at fences; found soon; young hounds joined in the cry." "Attended quarter sessions." These are examples of the most noteworthy events in the Squire's life which were held worthy of record in his diary.

"Have you found the place?" he asked, standing behind his daughter.

"Yes, father."

"What's the last?"

"'Lictor shows symptoms of tongue.'"

"Ah! Go on, then. '7th—Dined at Elliot's. Lost three guineas, and damn the luck at cards.' Got that?"

"Yes, sir. Without swearing at the luck."

"Very well. 'Edward Elliot asked for Georgiana. Gave my consent with much pleasure.'"

The colour mantled to the girl's cheeks. The pen hung hesitatingly in her white fingers. Then she wrote her father's words on the page without a shake, adding to the entry on her own account: "But I will never give mine—G. H.," and held the declaration of independence under her father's nose.

The Squire flew into a great rage.

"Madam!" he thundered.

"Sir," quietly replied his daughter.

"I've set my heart on this. I have. After all I've done for you! An empress could not have had such horses to ride

as you have had, nor a queen could not have been taught to ride straighter. Are you going to defy me?"

"I hope, sir," Georgiana answered, with the usual feminine evasion of the direct question, I hope that you will not be so unreasonable as to persist in urging me to marry the writer of this letter."

"Unreasonable, she calls it—unreasonable! Now that's too good."

"There is nothing to be said against Mr. Wilton," continued the young lady, shifting her ground. "He may not have much money, but——"

"You'll bring no Wiltons here, I can tell you; and to cut matters short," said the Squire, pulling out his watch, "as we've got nine miles to ride to cover, once for all, when young Elliot asks you for an answer you'll say, 'Yes.'"

"O father!——"

"And if you won't do it out of love for me—and nobody can say I haven't been one father out of ten thousand to you—I'll have you to understand my authority is to be respected."

"Father," she cried, "you know I love you dearly."

She put out her arms, but the Squire stood back a step or two.

"But I have given my promise to Mr. Wilton. I love him better than all the world. You have opposed me all along; but women are not to be forced into marrying to please even their fathers. I can be happy with nobody else, and I mean to have him."

With this spirited speech the young Diana closed the door behind her, and left her father to his fury and the perusal of Elliot's letter, which lay crumpled on the floor.

"Very well, my lady! very well, indeed," he said, as the door closed behind her; "we shall see who is master, you or I."

The meet that day was at Windmill Gorse, a place in high favour with the foxhunters of the district—a sure find and a good run. There were nearly a hundred horsemen in the field, to say nothing of rustics on foot. The dismantled mill crowned a gentle rise, on which were several acres of old

gorse. From the summit you could count eight church steeples, and see into four adjoining counties. Well-timbered pasture land of sound old turf stretched in all directions as far as the eye could see. It was a paradise for sportsmen, and its effect told upon none more than upon Squire Haughmond, who arrived in huntsman's time, at a quarter-past ten sharp. Mounted on a slashing grey, arrayed in a green cloth coat, with a leathern belt round his ample waist, black velvet cap, and mahogany tops, buckling behind, the master rode with pride among his brother sportsmen. Georgiana followed, mounted on her favourite mare, a dark-brown, fifteen three, on short legs, and with most powerful quarters, her blue habit setting off her fine figure to the greatest advantage.

As she rode into the field, a little way behind her father and the parson, she was quickly singled out by the admiring eye of the pretender to her hand, young Elliot. He cantered across the field, and raising his hat to her, tried to read his fate in her eyes. But he could read nothing there.

The lady took the initiative.

"Mr. Elliot," she said, looking coyly down, "I am very much flattered by your proposal."

"I am sure——" Elliot began, placing a large ungloved hand on his heart.

"Do not for a moment misunderstand me, sir," Georgiana proceeded.

His heart thumped against his side.

"I can never give my hand to you. My heart is already given away."

"Miss Haughmond, if I might hope to win your affections, I would wait—any time—if you would only let me—. I would do anything for you. Give me one chance, pray."

"Mr. Elliot, delay would be worse than useless. I can trust to your honour. Promise me you will keep what I am about to tell you a secret from everybody for one hour."

Elliot gave her his word.

"I am going to be married this morning at Kingscote Church."

At this the young man opened his eyes very wide.

"Then—then I wish I was in somebody else's shoes. Is it Harry Wilton?"

"Yes," said Georgiana. "Now keep your promise;" and giving her bridle a shake, she started off at a canter for a coppice that skirted the field.

The first thought that came into the mind of the rejected lover was to go anywhere out of sight; his next impulse was to gallop as hard as he could, and soothe his disappointed feelings by taking everything that came in his way.

The Squire had put his hounds into the gorse, and was trying the cover in his most scientific fashion.

"Yooi in! in yooi! yoicks! yoicks!"

The bristly green spikes are alive with white tails. Now a hound speaks. The Squire knows the voice.

"Hark! hark! That's Vengeance speaking."

Silence again among the hounds.

"Get together; push him up; push him up. Yooi in! yoicks!"

Two voices from the far corner of the gorse now.

"Hark! Vengeance again. Push him up. Yooi, yooi, yooi-i-icks!"

A view-halloo from the corner of the field. Out come the hounds, well together, and the music is general.

"Gone away. Hark forrard! Yi haro, forrard! yi haro!"

Away rides the Squire behind his pack, with a mounted irregular cavalry nearer his hounds than he likes.

"Hold hard there, gentlemen, if you please. Plague take you!" to a farmer's son, mounted on a puller and plunger, taking his first lesson in sport. "Can't you come back there?"

And, led by Vengeance, the pack plunge into the spinney to which Georgiana had betaken herself. But the bird had flown on the wings of love a couple of miles on the bridle-road to Kingscote Church.

By her side rode the man she had chosen to take in such a very unconventional way for better—her love told her there could be no worse with Harry Wilton.

"Isn't it delightful?" she exclaimed.

"I am the happiest fellow in the world. For your sake, though, I would rather have had your father's consent."

"Don't be a bit afraid, Harry. He'll storm and rage; but he'll forgive us. I know he will; and he never would have let me have you if we'd waited—well—for ever."

"We have waited a precious long time, darling, as it is."

"And I'll take all the blame. It *was* my idea, was it not, Harry?"

"All yours, my own! and a very clever idea too, and worthy of my Georgy's bright wits."

"I love anything romantic," cried the beautiful girl.

"Except a hero of romance, Georgy. You can't make that out of me."

"I love you—with—all—my—heart."

If they had been walking, her lover would have kissed her lips; as it was, he kissed the gold knob of her riding-whip.

"I wonder if my father has missed me yet."

Then she wondered if they had found a fox—wondered what her father would say when he knew the truth—wondered if young Elliot would hint at her escape; and her lover did his best to reassure her, for even the boldest young ladies require the support of the most comforting assurances under such trying circumstances.

"O Harry dear! let us ride faster. I feel that unless I gallop like mad I shall never keep up my courage to do it."

"Come, then. But never say that. It is not like my brave Georgy. Hark! I thought I heard a cry," exclaimed Wilton, looking round.

"Oh! where?" cried Georgiana, turning pale as paper.

"Did you see that fellow there, through the gap? Dash the Dutch! they're not hunting."

"They're hunting us," replied the girl.

"Come on. Now for it."

"Straight across country, Harry."

"As the crow flies."

"Here they come, down the hill. There's only one way out of it; we must pound them."

"Who are they?"

Parson Downes and Mr. Elliot, and my father is not far behind."

A cry followed them; but they rode like the wind. A double post and rails was the first obstacle to their runaway progress. Georgiana cleared it at once; Harry made two jumps of it. On they raced, neck and neck, over a broad meadow. The fence was what has since been called a bull-finch. They cleared it together, and ventured to look back. Their pursuers had not gained on them a yard. A gallop of three hundred yards over ridge and furrow brought them face to face with a stiff fence, hedge, bank, and post and rail. Georgiana's splendid animal took it in its stride; but Harry Wilton made a mess of it, and tasted dirt.

"O Harry!" sobbed the breathless girl.

"All right; no harm done."

He squeezed himself through first and his horse after him.

"Oh! if you had been hurt!" Georgiana had got a cold fit. Her courage was going again.

"We've lost ground now. Never mind; we must make it up."

He leaped into his saddle, and on they went.

The wind bore the halloos of their pursuers after them; but the church was in sight now, four miles off. They were in the valley; the church was on a hill. There was that bright beacon of hope to steer to. So they went on at a racing pace, now gaining a little on their pursuers, now losing ground. Luckily the fences were not so stiff in this lower pasture land. Here they got along splendidly, and their pursuers were now out of sight, hidden by intervening hedgerows. This revived the lady's courage. They galloped over a forty-acre meadow in high spirits.

"We are beating them," said the gentleman.

"We have beaten them," said the lady.

They sailed over a fence together; a few yards off was a brook. They came to it. Georgiana's mare took it like a swallow.

Harry was left on the other side. His horse would not look at water.

"Now I'm settled," he said.

"O Harry! rush him over it."

But he would not be rushed. She cleared it back again, and gave him a lead; but he would not be led.

Wilton thrashed his horse, spurred him, coaxed him, and swore at him; but on the bank he set his forelegs out like two pokers, and broke away bits of the turf, but nothing more.

"O Harry! what shall we do? They will catch us. They must be in the next field by this time."

"Come and try to whip him over it," and she did whip the horse's quarters with a will, but to no good purpose.

"Let us go some other way; we might come to a bridge."

"My father—my father's with them now, perhaps. That horse'll never jump it, Harry."

"No, but I will;" and throwing himself out of the saddle, he gave his horse a couple of stinging cuts on the shoulder and turned him loose. Then taking a run, Harry Wilton cleared the brook easily enough, and ran by Georgiana's side the rest of the way to the church.

"They've given us up," he said, as the pair mounted the hill.

"Thank Heaven for that."

In the churchyard was a little old stable built for the parson to put his horse in. Here Georgiana's mare was tied to the rack. On the bridegroom's arm, panting, she entered the church; but there was nobody there to receive her but the clerk.

"Mr. Downes has not come yet."

After a terrible ten minutes, hot and out of breath, he arrived.

"Why did you not stop?" he asked.

"Oh—h—h, we took you for your brother, my father's Mr. Downes. Was not Mr. Elliot with you?"

"I was," said Elliot, who at this juncture entered the vestry.

"To what may we owe the honour of this visit?" asked Georgiana icily.

Now, young Elliot had come to do a very handsome thing.

"I've come to give you away instead of leaving it to the clerk to do—if you'll let me."

And when the parson, wearing a surplice over his boots and spurs, came to that part of the service which is thus set down:

"¶ Then shall the minister say,

"Who giveth this Woman to be married to this Man?"

Edward Elliot bravely answered, "I do."

So the elopement had proved a success. The rival suitors were sworn friends. Georgiana was supremely happy, and Harry was as proud as a peacock of his handsome bride.

But as they walked down the aisle, they heard the "dead hallo" almost in the church. The fox, after a brilliant run, had been killed in some straw in the stable in which Georgiana's horse stood, and now the Squire held her mare and his own horse at the gate of the churchyard.

The state of affairs needed no explanation. He took it in at one glance. His daughter trembled. She had never seen such a look on his face before. She advanced a step towards him.

"Never come near me again," was all he said, as he threw the reins of Georgiana's mare to his Whip, and called his hounds away to find another fox. But the field lingered to see the "happy pair"—the bride in tears—depart ingloriously in a farmer's chaise.

Eighteen months passed. Mr. Haughmond was, in his opinion, the laughingstock of the county. Women were vermin. He had publicly horsewhipped the reverend "skunk of a brother" who had presumed to marry his daughter in a church he had given him—horsewhipping a clergyman being not altogether an unique feat at the end of the eighteenth century. But parson Downes and young Elliot let Georgiana know how things were going at Haughmond Hall. What they told her was this. First, the Squire left off cards; then he talked of giving up the hounds to a younger man; then his appetite began to fail him; but last, and worst of all, he never got beyond his first bottle of port after dinner. These were good signs, Georgiana knew. But her father resolutely refused to see her, open her letters, or recognise her existence. She was

dead to him, he said, and he moped with his dogs, all alone.

Mrs. Wilton was a young lady of resource. She had devised the romantic elopement; now she hit upon another scheme.

She drove in a chaise thirteen miles on a hot July afternoon with her own old nurse and Master Gilbert Wilton behind her.

In the shrubbery the young gentleman, just six months old, was popped into a great wicker basket built on purpose. Nurse carried the basket to the butler. The butler carried it to the master of Haughmond Hall. Both were in the plot.

"Heaven help the man if he can find it in his heart to say owt but yea to such a beauty," said the old woman who had nursed Georgiana, as she handed her treasure to her old fellow-servant.

Squire Haughmond woke from his nap.

A little cry made him aware of the visitor's presence.

He opened the hamper. There, on a great pillow, lay a lovely boy. On his little white frock was pinned a card with this upon it:

"Grandfather, if you please, I'm come to see you."

For the nurse and the mother there was an awful three minutes of suspense.

Then the squire's bell rang.

"Bring my daughter here."

Then to himself: "The bitch'll not be far from the puppy."

Inelegant, but not unkind. The squire was a foxhunter, and knew the habits of dogs and women.

"God bless your dear heart, mistress," cried the old nurse, breathless among the laurels, where her mistress was in hiding, "he's got him on his knee."

That afternoon Georgiana rode her own mare back to fetch her husband. They never left Haughmond Hall again, and a Wilton holds it now, as good a foxhunter as his great-grandfather was langsyne.

THE DEATH OF SAMUEL PICKWICK.

The following "*In memoriam*" notice should have appeared on the morning of May the 2d, 1862, in one of the daily papers. It was, however, found impossible for the editor to insert it, in consequence of the pressure on his space caused by the opening of the Exhibition. In consequence of this accident, the death of Mr. Pickwick was passed over with no notice from the press.

WE regret to announce the death, at an advanced age, of Mr. Samuel Pickwick, F.R.S., F.R.A.S., F.R.S.I., F.R.L.S., corresponding member of many foreign learned societies, formerly chairman of the Pickwick Club; which took place at his residence at Dulwich, on the night of April the 30th.

The deceased gentleman, as is well known, attracted considerable attention in the scientific world some thirty-five years ago by his discovery of an inscribed stone in a small Kentish village, now known as the "Kentish Stone," and deposited in the national collection. Some of our readers are old enough to remember the controversy which agitated the minds of savants for some months after that event. They will remember how it was finally concluded by Mr. Pickwick's masterpiece—the treatise in which he set the matter at rest, and triumphantly proved the antiquity of the monument and the importance of its inscription. One Blotton, otherwise unknown, was the chief assailant of this famous relic of former ages. Mr. Pickwick, after carefully collecting and collating all the various readings, gave his own, which, we believe, has never more been disputed.

The main features in this, the more active portion of his life, are already well known. It will be interesting to record

what has been ascertained of Mr. Pickwick's earlier life and his latest years.

Mr. Pickwick was born about the year 1778, in the heart of England's metropolis. Some of his German admirers, carried away, perhaps, by blind admiration, have suggested that to this circumstance may be attributed that expansive geniality, that kindly application of his profound knowledge of the human heart, which at all times characterised the great man. For, they argue, to be born and to be reared in the very centre and focus of England, and in the very *ὀμφαλός* of the British Dominion, is to gather to oneself, as it were to one point, all the converging lines of sympathy, brotherhood, charity and patriotism. From the centre of England, they go on, rightly sprang the typical Englishman, regarded from a social point of view. Rightly, too, regarded from a scientific point of view. A great mathematician and geologist—a man of one pursuit—may well spring up elsewhere, but he whose knowledge was almost universal, whose insight into natural truths was almost intuition, whose breadth of view was unequalled—where else should he be born than in the very centre of London?

Mr. Pickwick was not of aristocratic descent. We nowhere find him boastful of his parentage. His father, we have reason to believe, was in business. That he was highly respected in his ward we do not doubt; that he took a leading position among the citizens we infer from the fact of his having been churchwarden for ten years in the parish of St. Cunegonda; that he was a man of liberal views and great natural piety is certain from the life and opinions of his great son.

The place of the child Pickwick's education is, we are sorry to say, unknown to us. Our efforts to discover it have hitherto been unsuccessful. We have searched in the records of St. Paul's School; in those of the Charter House; in those of Merchant Taylors': in vain. It is not a matter of great importance, and yet one would like to learn the name of the Gamaliel under whom he sat, and to pay a pilgrimage to the house where he first learnt the rudiments of the

Latin tongue. Perhaps in some forgotten nook, the bench on which he sat is still standing, now sat on by other boys; perhaps the beams of some old house could still show, traced with a boy's penknife, the initials S. P. But, most likely, all traces are destroyed of that obscure city school—all the benches broken up; all the beams pulled down; all the names planed out.

In early life Mr. Pickwick entered his father's counting-house. Like Defoe, like many great men, he spent his earlier days in unremitting toil. It is evident, however, that he threw into his daily business some portion of his gigantic intellect, for he was able to retire comparatively early on a handsome independence; and, secondly, that his researches into science were carried on in the few leisure moments which his avocations permitted him; for, during this period, he produced those two startling pamphlets: the first on the Origin of the Hampstead Ponds, and the other on the Theory of Tittlebats. We have also the authority of an extract from the transactions of the club, dated May 12th, 1827, which proves that his scientific labours had been carried on also in the suburbs of Hornsey, Highgate, Brixton, and Camberwell. It was immediately after that date that he entered upon that long course of travel which occupied him, including the three or four months spent in the Fleet Prison, more than three years. And it was during these three years that he began, carried on, and finally settled the Cobham Stone dispute. At the close of his travels, he purchased and furnished a small house near Dulwich. In that delicious retreat he spent the rest of his life, cheered by the love of his friends, the caresses of his godchildren, two or three of whom were always resident with him, and protected by the faithful Sam Weller, who, married to Mary, lived with him, and never quitted him till the day of his death. For a long time, too, the little cottage near the house was inhabited by Sam's father. But he died about twenty years since, partly of old age, and partly of disgust at the progress of railways. His last words, singularly fulfilled at this present day, were a prophecy that before long there would be no more stage coaches in England.

Mr. Pickwick's intellect remained clear to the last. One of the greatest trials that fell upon him was the death of his old friend, Master Humphrey. He followed the good old man as the chief mourner, and wept over the grave of his most constant companion. The clock was left him by Master Humphrey's will. Indeed, he had a singular collection of legacies. So many old friends, so many new friends—old in years—were his, and he lived to so great an age, that these mementoes of friendship had multiplied until they became a sort of small museum. For, there was good old Mr. Wardle's wassail bowl; there was a Saxon sword bequeathed him by the clergyman of Dingley Dell; there was the chairman's hammer of the Pickwick Club; there were the sugar-tongs left him by Mr. Scrope, upon whom he had called for the Christmas charities; there were two walking-sticks of the Brothers Cheeryble; there was a mug left him by old Mr. Winkle; there was a portrait of Mr Tupman, who died at Richmond ten years before his revered chief. There, too, were humble memorials—the watch of Captain Cuttle; a wooden toy, cut by Newman Noggs; a walking-stick of ebony, inlaid with gold, sent from Hayti by the prime minister, His Excellency Alfred Jingle, Duke of Port Grave, together with the order of the Golden Sugar-cane, conferred on him by His Majesty the Emperor Soulouque, before that potentate's downfall. There was then, also, a full-length portrait of Colonel Newcome, lately deceased; with him Mr. Pickwick was not personally acquainted, but having witnessed his conduct at the breaking of the Great Bank, conceived such a respect for his character, that he went and bought the portrait at the sale of the Colonel's effects. And, perhaps prized above all, there was the little sonnet which he could never look at without wiping his eyes. These curiosities were laid out with scrupulous care on a side table in his study. No one, except Sam Weller, was ever permitted to touch them; and on them he gazed night and morning, and thought of the many kind and honest hearts which he should never see again upon the earth. Every forenoon he walked in his garden, talked

with any of his godchildren who happened to be with him ; or with the little ones, the youngest of Sam's family, who played round his feet. He spent his evenings either in the company of those friends who visited him, for he never went out, or in that of Sam, who, when no one was present, took his place in the study, opposite to his master, brewed him a small glass of punch, smoked his pipe, and narrated old stories. And of these old stories neither narrator nor listener ever tired. It was not that they were so good. Better stories have sprung up since ; but they were large-hearted and kindly, and they recalled old times and old scenes. It is now a few weeks since that Mr. Pickwick was sitting thus in his study with his old and faithful servant.

"Sam," he said, "young Mr. Winkle and his wife are coming here to-morrow."

"Baby comin', too?"

"Baby, of course, comes too," said Mr. Pickwick.

"To-morrow's your birthday, sir," said Sam.

"My birthday ! I am eighty-four, Sam, to-morrow. Eighty-four. It is a great age. I shall not see another birthday."

"Nonsense, sir ; you're young yet—heart o' five-and-twenty still—and I'm getting on for sixty. But, bless you, lots o' people lives to a hundred, only the newspapers don't find it out."

"No, no, Sam ; I shall not live to a hundred. I do not think I shall live many more months. I feel——"

"Don't you talk like that, sir. We can't afford to lose you yet. Dyin', indeed ! when I'm alive?"

"I am selfish, Sam. I ask not to live after my old friends and companions. Let me go first."

The old man looked into the fire, and a tear rolled down his face. "Yes, all gone but you, and Winkle, and Snodgrass. All gone! the old friends and the new. Even Perken is dead. Let me go first, Sam. Let me go first."

"Come, come ; we are both grey-headed. If you are eighty, I am sixty. Little difference between us. Poor Mary ! she's gone first of the three of us—poor girl !"

But Mr. Pickwick did not notice him. He was reading old faces in the coals.

"Your children will not be unprovided for, Sam," he said at length; "but how could I reward you?"

"Why—why—" said Sam, "up there I may be your servant for sure."

"Nay, nay; there, at least, we are all equal in His eyes. But I hope, I think we shall know all our friends up there. God has been very good to me during this life."

"Come, sir; let me make your punch. Don't think about it. Lots of days for us both yet."

Mr. Pickwick took his punch, and drank it, and went to bed. According to old custom, Sam tucked him in, put the night lamp safely on the mantel-shelf, and the bell-pull within his reach, and was going away with a "Good-night, sir," when Mr. Pickwick called him back.

"Stay, Sam. Shake hands with me."

Sam took that poor old hand in his, and dropped a great tear on it.

"Life has been very sweet, friend Sam," said Mr. Pickwick; "but it will soon be over—soon be over. A better life awaits us, my friend; a better life."

Sam bent down, kissed his hand, and hurried out of the room. When he went downstairs, he found his daughter sitting up for him. His eyes were red and heavy.

"What is it, father? Is Mr Pickwick ill?"

"I see it comin', my dear. I see it comin'. When it comes, send for the undertaker, and measure me too."

The next morning, when Sam took in his master's cup of tea and hot water, at eight o'clock, he found him sleeping on his side, so placidly, so peacefully, with such a sweet smile on his lips, that he did not like to wake him. He stood over the bed and looked at him. Suddenly, a trembling seized his limbs, he tottered to the table, placed on it the tea and the hot water, and reeled, rather than walked, back to the bed. He put his hand on Mr. Pickwick's forehead; it was cold as ice; on Mr. Pickwick's pulse, it was still; he turned down the sheet, and put his hand on his heart, it was beating

no more ; it too was cold, and stilled, and lifeless ; for Mr. Pickwick was dead.

Yes ; he had died silently, quietly, without, as it seemed, a single pang or a single struggle in the dead of night.

Mr. Pickwick was dead, and the first news of the melancholy event was spread by Sam's daughter, who found her father at the bedside, pouring out his grief in passionate sobs. She ran for the doctor ; but the doctor's aid was wanted only for the mourner.

It was on a clear, cold, moonlit night that Mr. Pickwick died—it was on a cloudy, dull, miserable morning when they buried him. All his living friends, all his godchildren, all the poor whom he had helped and cheered, followed his funeral. But the chief mourner was Sam Weller.

When Sam came home, he remarked that he didn't feel well. In the evening he was so much worse that his daughter sent for the doctor, and for her brother, who is a clerk in the Custom House ; a handsome lad, and clever—handsome, for he is like his mother ; clever, for he is like his father—and, like all the family, possessed of an unbounded love and admiration for his benefactor, Mr. Pickwick. The doctor recommended leeches and blisters, but Sam would have none of them.

“No,” he said ; “it's a comin'. I knew it was a comin'. I dreamed of Mary last night. I dreamt that I see her a' sittin' on a cloud with Mr. Pickwick and the old 'un, and they beckoned me up. Samuel Pickwick Weller, my boy,” said he, addressing his eldest son, “don't you never be ashamed of your father's bein' a servant ; for he was the servant, you may tell 'em, of Mr. Pickwick ; and your grandfather drove the Ipswich coach for fifteen years ; and was respected off the coach and on. Mary, my gal, give me a glass of brandy-and-water, weak, my dear, and then Sammy'll help me to bed.”

They helped him to bed, and his head began to wander. He discoursed of Mr. Nupkins ; of the red-nosed man ; of kissing Mary behind the door ; of folding mats ; of Brick Lane ; of Mr. John Smauker.

Next day he was worse, and delirious still. About four o'clock in the afternoon he sat up in bed. He appeared to know his children.

"My gal," said he, "be like your mother. Her manner was affable and conformable. Your grandfather said so. My son, beware of widders. More widders is married than single women. Your grandfather said so. Be honest, my children, and good; be true and steady, and God bless you all." He looked up, with a last gaze of love—"I'm a-comin', Mary, dear. I'm a-coming, sir. In one moment;" and so fell back dead.

We record the death of this faithful and attached servant, because we think it is strikingly illustrative, not only of the sterling character of Sam but of the sincere love which Mr. Pickwick inspired in all who lived with him. Sam was buried in the next grave to his master, seven days after he was put into the earth.

Mr. Pickwick's will, which was opened by his ward and distant cousin, Mr. Augustus Snodgrass, was found to contain an immense number of bequests. A handsome annuity of ten hundred pounds was left to poor Sam, who, as we have seen, did not live to enjoy it; smaller annuities of fifty pounds to each of his children; and the rest to be divided equally among all his godsons. "I am a lonely man," he wrote; "I have no relations to quarrel over my money. I leave it to those whose love has brightened my latter days—my dear godchildren." The museum of mementoes was bequeathed to Mr. Snodgrass, to be passed on, at his death, to Mr. Winkle, should he survive him; at the death of the survivor, it was to go intact and entire to Mr. Winkle's eldest son, Mr. Nathaniel Samuel Pickwick Winkle: or should he, too, die, it was to go to Mr. Snodgrass's eldest son, Mr. Augustus Samuel Pickwick Snodgrass. A special token of affection, his own punch-bowl, was left to his friend and godson, Mr. John Samuel Pickwick Trundle, with his own recipe, the result of many years' careful investigation of scientific principles for the making and brewing of punch.

His house was to be inhabited by Sam Weller so long as

he lived. At his death, the library and manuscripts were to go to the British Museum, and the furniture was then to be sold for the benefit of Sam's children. Each of his friends, however, was asked to choose a book from his shelves, and to illustrate it with a photograph of himself. There was still a row left of his pamphlet on the Cobham Stone controversy; and it is pleasing to be able to add that every one of his friends chose that work as the most fitting memorial of the departed.

We shall never again visit Dulwich without feeling that one great charm of the place was gone. Formerly, it was pleasing to think that in that village lived Mr. Pickwick; now we shall only sigh over the long life that has at last come to an end.

On his grave are engraved the words "His works live after him." On Sam's grave, the words, "Faithful to the end."

One word more. It is said that Mr. Snodgrass, whose poetic aspirations are so well known, intends, as soon as he has partially tranquillised his agitated spirits, to set about a poem on the death of Mr. Pickwick.

WHEN THE SHIP COMES HOME.

CHAPTER I.

RELEASE.

A CONVICT! That is what I was in the year 1851—a convict, with a sentence on my head of twenty years' penal servitude, fifteen of them still to elapse, for forgery and embezzlement, the crime having been committed under circumstances (as the judge remarked) of the most revolting and exaggerated ingratitude—a convict in New South Wales.

It seemed to me at the time, and it seems to me still, but a small thing for which I received a remission of the unfinished term of years, compared with the thing for which I was found guilty and received my sentence. There was a rising, a sudden and purposeless rising, among the convicts; and, at a critical moment Heaven in its mercy put into my head to do what they called an heroic deed. It saved the lives, they said, of the governor and one or two prison-warders, and it gave me my freedom. Let us say no more about it.

My freedom! What did that mean to me? Let me try, bitter as is the recollection of that time, to recall something of what it meant, something of what my prison life had been.

I was in prison for five years and three months. When my servitude began, I used to lie sleepless at night; sometimes stupidly wondering; sometimes moaning in agony of misery; sometimes praying for swift and speedy death; sometimes asking bitterly if prayer were any use, if there was any one at all to hear and pity outside the white stone wall; sometimes meditating on some possible mode of suicide to end it all—because, you see, I was innocent.

At the beginning of my imprisonment, when I slept, my thoughts would fly back to the happy days of liberty. I saw myself at school; I was visiting my patron, master, and benefactor, Mr. Baldwin, to whom my dead father had been a faithful and trusted servant. He questioned me, according to his wont, on my progress in the classes; he patted me on the head when I showed him my prizes; and when, at sixteen, he took me away from the school, where he had paid for my education, it was to give me a desk in his counting house, with the promise of advancement should I deserve it. As the years went on, I saw myself pushed up with as much rapidity as was fair to others. Responsible work was put into my hands. At twenty I enjoyed such confidence as the head of a great City house could bestow on a young clerk, and I was allowed such a salary that I could live comfortably, and have my little sister—Ruth—my only sister—to live with me. When my dreams reached this point I generally awoke with a start and a rush of thoughts, confused at first, but swiftly resolving themselves into the ghastly truth. For then followed the dreadful end—my good old master in the witness-box, telling, with sobs of a broken voice, how he had loved and trusted me; the immediate and unanimous finding of the verdict; the voice of the judge—cold, stern, never to be forgotten—stating that, in the face of the facts before him, he must make a signal example of as black a case as had ever been revealed in a court of justice. The sentence of the court would be twenty years of penal servitude. And after that, my little Ruth—oh! my pretty, innocent, helpless little sister of ten—weeping before me, when she came to take her leave of me, and I not able to do anything—not the least single thing—not able to say any word, not the least single word of comfort—too miserable even to assert my innocence! I cannot bear even now to think about it. For I was innocent.

After a few months of prison-life I left off dreaming of the past. Then the present was with me, night and day—a present without joy, hope, or uncertainty; a present without pain, shame, or suffering, save for the leaden weight of degradation which never leaves a prisoner. Yet no open sense

of disgrace, because there were none to look in my face and shame me with a glance. You do not feel disgrace before a warder or an official, and yet the shame is that part of the punishment which the judge always forgets; it comes after the sentence is worked out. There was no suffering, because the day's work brought the night's fatigue, and there was no one at fall of evening in my solitary cell to keep me awake with reproaches; but always that heavy load upon the brain, and the present, monotonous and dreadful as it was, with me night and day. I ceased in a very few months to think, to feel, to look forward. I became a machine; even the thought of my innocence died out of me by degrees. I supposed that, somehow, I must have done it—perhaps in madness, perhaps in a dream; or rather I accepted the present and forgot the past. I even forgot poor little Ruth, and ceased to wonder what had become of her; I forgot what I had been. I was a convict; there was nothing before me but prison all my life.

The seasons rolled on; the bright sun overhead beat down upon the bare prison yards; the moonlight streamed through the bars of my window. Summer followed winter, and was followed by winter again. Outside the prison, the world went on in its quiet colonial way. No doubt, within a stone's throw of my cell, women were wooed, children were born; there were rejoicings and thanksgivings in families, with mirth of boys and girls, and smiles of mothers. Inside, I for one thought no more of such things as love and happiness; I thought of nothing. But for one happy change in my work, I think I should have drifted downwards slowly into that dismal slough of stupid madness, once plunged in which the patient can no longer think of anything, not even his own sorrowful life, or do anything, save sit and watch vacuously the hands of the prison clock creep round, the shadows shift across the stone floor, and the whitewash grow dull as the night creeps through the bars. That change came when I had been at Sydney a twelvemonth. They put me, because I was well educated and intelligent, into the apothecary's room. There were a few medical books of reference, which I was

allowed in the intervals of work to read. And so by degrees, a new interest was awakened in my brain, and in a dragged, broken-winged fashion, I began to live again. What I read in the day I thought over at night, until I knew all that the books had to teach me. The doctor brought more books, and I read them, and he taught me things not to be learned in books. Thus I became in some sort a physician and a surgeon. Once, when I showed the doctor what I knew, he startled me into long-forgotten hope. "When your time is out," said he, "you might become an apothecary; they always want them in the coolie ships."

Time out! I felt a sudden giddiness, as the blood rushed to my head. Time out! Ah! When? For there were fifteen years yet to serve; and even with a ticket-of-leave there were nine years before me. Twenty years of age when I was sentenced; twenty-five when the doctor spoke those kindly words of forecast. I might be forty before my release could be counted on, for they are hard on forgers. What sort of life was there beyond that fortieth year, for a man who has to begin over again and carry such a burden of disgrace as mine.

Enough about the convict-time. I received in due course a full remission of the remaining period. When I came away, the governor offered to shake hands with me, because he said I was a brave man. I asked him to shake hands with me because I was an innocent man, and he shook his head; then I thanked him, but refused to take the proffered hand. For the sense of my innocence came back to me, strong and clear, on the morning of my release. Then the chaplain rebuked me, and rightly. Why should the governor—why should any one—believe me innocent? Only the doctor stood my friend. "I have read your case," he said, "and it's the clearest case I ever did read: either you are the forger, or the devil; and since you have worked for me, Warneford, I believe, upon my honour, that it was the devil. But no one else will ever believe that. Good-bye, my lad, and God prosper you." So that I had my little mite of comfort. In all this great world there was one man who thought my assertions

true. Stay—there was another man; one who not only believed, but knew me innocent—the man who did it. But who was he? For I had no enemy in the world, and there was no one whom I could even reasonably suspect.

I left the prison with an angry heart when I ought to have been most grateful, for I realised more bitterly when I breathed the free air again that, for the rest of my miserable life, I was to be a marked man. Go where I would, fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, there was no spot so retired, no place so remote, but that some echo of the past might visit it, breathing my name and my story; there would be no moment when I should feel safe from the fear that some finger might reach forth from the crowd, and point me out as Warneford the Forger—Warneford the Convict. Why, the governor said that the papers were ringing with my “heroic deed.” So much the worse for me, because it would make concealment more difficult. Grateful? Why should I be grateful, I asked, for being delivered from an unjust bondage, with the stigma of dishonour branded on my brow, plain for all men to read? Time enough to think of gratitude when I could plead before the world a proved and manifest innocence.

The city of Sydney in those days was a quiet and peaceful place, not on the way to get rich, and with little to talk about. They wanted to make much of me and my exploit; offers of employment came in; people reasoned with me that, if I stayed there, I should certainly get on; they pointed out other men who had worked their term, and stayed in the settlement, and were now flourishing and respected citizens. But I could not stay; there was no rest possible for me till I was back in London. I wanted to see the old place again. I thought if I could have a quiet three months on board a ship, I could put things together in my mind better than I could do in the prison, and perhaps get a clue. Because, you see, I never had been able, from the very beginning, to put things clearly to myself. Before the trial, I had but one thing to say—I did not do it; of that alone I was certain. When my case came on, I stood like one in a

dream, while the circumstantial evidence piled itself up, and even my counsel could find nothing to say for me. After the sentence, I was as a man who is stunned.

And then another thought came over me as I stood outside the prison-wall, a thought which should have softened any heart—the thought of little Ruth. She was ten years old when I left her—fifteen now. What was become of her? It had been my earnest wish that I might bring her up to be a gentlewoman, like her mother before her—a sweet Christian maid, as her dead mother was before her—and strong in goodness, as her dead father had been. Now what had become of her? And whose fault—whose fault? It was mocking grace of sunshine and sweetness of spring, it was bitterness of beauty in flowers and tender grasses wet with dew, that I saw for the first time for many years. The free air that I felt around me could bring no salve or comfort to a ruined life; it could not drive away the thought of another whose wreck was due to my own.

So the freedom which was restored to me threatened to become a curse, and, with angry heart, I shook off the Sydney dust from my feet, and started for Melbourne. I would go there; I had a little money, which I had earned by my apothecary work. I would take the cheapest passage home under another name; it might be that no one would know that a convict was on board, and so I could sit quietly during a long three-months' voyage and think. Just then I could not think clearly, because I was mad and blind with re-awakened rage; and, in my bitterness, I cursed the day that gave me birth. A convict released before his time! Why, if people looked at me, I knew in my heart that they were saying, "That is George Warneford, the famous forger, let off for courage in the mutiny. But any one can see that he is a convict; that is apparent from his face." "And whose fault?" I cried in my blind anguish; "whose fault?"

As I strode along the faintly-worn tracks and silent paths of that lonely country, there grew up in me a purpose and a hope. The purpose was to hide myself when I arrived in England—to get, if possible, some sort of occupation which

would leave my evenings free for thought, and to devote all that thought to the steady following up of every clue that might present itself. My hope was to stand one day before the world—my prisoner in one hand, my proofs in the other—and demand revenge.

And all that follows is the history of how this purpose got itself carried out, in what manner my hope was achieved, and what sort of revenge I perpetrated at last.

CHAPTER II.

“MURDER ON BOARD!”

I WORKED my way to Melbourne on foot, hoarding my money, as if in some vague way it was going to assist me in my purpose. Heaven help me with my purpose! In the morning I was resolute and confident. I would get back to London; on the voyage I would set down all that I could remember, to the smallest detail—every little fact of that happy, bygone time before this evil thing fell upon me. No doubt I should find a clue at last; somehow I would follow it up, step by step, till my proofs accumulated to irresistible evidence. I pictured myself, under the glamour of that bright sunshine of Australia, standing before the prosperous devil who had done the deed—he was always prosperous and happy in my dreams—and dragging him before justice. I was myself standing before the old man—my benefactor—denouncing his readiness to believe, his unrelenting persecution when he did believe; always hurrying onwards a full and complete revenge, till not one of those who had had a hand in my unmerited ruin should remain without his share of a cup of bitterness.

In the night I saw things in their grim reality; I saw how weak I was; I saw the hopelessness of my task; and I foresaw how I was to creep back to my native country, pardoned, it is true, for good conduct, but branded till death with the gallows-tree mark of forger and thief. And at such

a time I was willing to go back to my prison, and serve out the rest of my life in the apothecary's room.

Lurid hope that seemed golden, or dark despair, it mattered nothing, because, in hope or despair, my miserable life was before me—life stretches long before the eyes at twenty-five—and it had to be got through somehow.

Always, in those days, the thought of myself and my wrongs! The wrong was so great, the ruin so overwhelming, that there was no room left in my mind for any other feeling. For instance, I arrived in the colony of Victoria in the days when the whisper of gold was running like wildfire through its scattered hamlets and along its giant sheep-runs; but when other men's nerves thrilled at the chance of boundless wealth waiting to be picked up, I listened coldly. Again, to this day I have no sense or recollection of what the country was like through which I toiled alone, from station to station, in my resolution to get to the place where my face at least, if not my name, should be unknown. I know I walked through wild and savage districts, where there were dangers of thirst, dangers of reptiles, and dangers of treacherous natives. I believe that I sometimes slept out for days together. I know that I was always alone, except that sometimes a friendly shepherd on an up-country station gave me tea and damper. What it was like, that great continent through which I journeyed on foot, I cannot say, because I walked along with open eyes which saw not, ears which never heard, and senses which never felt anything. Only, as I said before, the light and sunshine witched me into confidence which the darkness tore away; and the agony was like the agony of Prometheus when the eagle tore away his liver.

I think in those days I must have been mad; for, if I had not been mad, I must have known that there was still one heart, somewhere in England, beating with love for me, one voice going up in prayer for me day and night. But, if I thought of Ruth at all, it was to remember how my ruin was hers, and it made me more fiercely mad.

It was not difficult at Melbourne to get a ship bound for

London. The harbour was full of ships, whose crews had deserted and gone off to the gold-fields. Now and then the captains had deserted their ships as well. They all seemed bound for London, because the port of Melbourne was then a very little place, and its trade was small; the trouble was that there were no crews to carry back the ships. I had to cast about and wait. I was the only man, I believe, in all that colony who neither looked to find gold for himself in the diggings, nor tried to make money out of those who were starting for the diggings.

After a few weeks of restless waiting—each day that kept me from a visionary revenge was a day lost—I discovered that a vessel would probably sail immediately. I got this information, in an indirect way, from a man whose business it was to plunder the diggers at starting. He was a great scoundrel, I remember, and I used to compare him, piling up money hand over hand by dishonest tricks and cheatings, with myself, the released felon of a blameless life. He asked me no questions, either where I was from or whether I was going. He took the money for my board, and he bade me hold myself in readiness for a start; and one day I got the word and went on board the clipper sailing vessel, *Lucy Derrick*, bound from Melbourne to London. I was a steerage passenger, the only one, because no other poor man in his senses would leave Melbourne at such a time. There was only one saloon passenger, and she was a young lady; of course no one but a lady would leave Melbourne when the very air was dry with thirst for gold. She was under the charge, I learned, of the captain, and was sent home in order that her father, a lawyer by profession, might go up to Ballarat and make his fortune in the gold-fields.

The captain was a grey-headed man of sixty-five or so, a man with a face scarred and scored in a thousand lines. It was a hard and stern face. This was well, because he had hard stern work before him. The chief officer, a young fellow of five-and-twenty, on the contrary, showed in his face, which was mild and soft-eyed, that he was not the man to command a crew of roughs and rowdies.

I say nothing against him, and in the end he fought it out to the death. There were a second and third mate too—one was a boy of sixteen, not yet out of his articles, the other was a rough, trusty fellow, every inch a sailor. As for the saloon passenger—she was to be my queen and mistress. Helen Elwood was her name. Her father brought her on board half an hour after I embarked, and took a hasty leave of her. I noticed neither him nor her, because, in truth, I was still dazed by the long dream in which I had walked all the way from Sydney to Melbourne—my dream of a purpose. I sat in the bows, with my bundle beside me, hardly noted when the anchor was weighed, and presently the ship spread her white sails, and we slipped away out to sea.

Then I began to look about me. The first thing I noticed was that the men were drunk; and I learned afterwards that if they had not been drunk they would not have been got on board at all. Then I saw the captain and officers drive them to work with blows. The men were like brute beasts, but I never saw brute beasts so knocked down and belaboured; they were drunk, but they understood enough to turn round when the officer was past, and swear savagely. On the quarter-deck, clinging to the taff-rail, and gazing at the receding shores, was the young lady, all alone. At the wheel stood a man with his legs wide apart, his eyes screwed up, and his head on one side; he was an oldish man. I put him down as the quartermaster or boatswain, and I was right. Every now and then he jerked his head in the direction of the young lady, and I knew that he was encouraging her, but of course I could not hear what he said, if, indeed, he did say anything.

All that first day the captain and the officers drove and ordered the men about as if they had been so many negro slaves. When night fell things were a little shipshape, and the men seemed gradually coming round. When I turned in the watch was set, and though neither the captain nor the chief officer left the deck, it was manifest that some sort of order was established, and that the captain meant to have things his way.

His own way it was for a month or more.

I suppose there was never got together, since ships first began to sail the ocean, a crew so utterly blackguard as the crew of the *Lucy Derrick*. As a steerage passenger, my place was forward, and I sat all day close to the forecastle, listening perforce to the oaths with which they interlarded their language, and the stories they told. Now, as an ex-convict returning from Sydney, there ought to have been nothing in the whole scale of human wickedness unfamiliar to me. Truth to say, there was very little. He who has been in a convict-ship, and has made the dismal voyage across the ocean with Her Majesty's felons, has had every opportunity of learning what a hell might be made of this fair earth, if men had their own wicked way. Somehow it might have been that my abject misery at the time blinded my eyes and stopped my ears. The voyage, with its sufferings by night, its despair by day, and the horror of my companionship, was all forgotten; so that, as I lay upon the deck, the imprecations and foul language of the crew of the *Lucy Derrick*, as they got together on the forecastle, awakened me from that stupor of thought into which I was fallen, as some unexpected noise at night falls upon the ears of an uneasy dreamer, and awakens him to reality. No one in the ship said anything to me, or took any notice of me. "It is because I am a convict," I whispered to myself. It was not. It was only because no one took the trouble to ascertain who and what the only steerage passenger was. I took my meals with the second and third mates, and we exchanged little conversation. I suppose they thought I was sulky. Between meals I went on deck, and stayed there; and, for want of anything to do, looked about me and watched the men.

In a few weeks after leaving land I became aware of several significant things. The first was that the officers never went forward alone, and that they were always armed; then that they were gloomy, and seemed to be watching the men. I noticed too—being, so to speak, among the sailors—that they whispered together a good deal. Among them was a young

fellow of five-and-twenty or so, who seemed the leader in the whisperings. He never passed another sailor without saying something in a low voice; and when he passed me he had a way, which exasperated me, of grinning and nodding. He was a smooth-faced man, with what seemed at first to be an upward twist of the right lip. This, which was the scar of a knife-wound, caught probably in some midnight broil, gave him a sinister appearance. His eyes were close together, and bright; his forehead was high, but receding; and he looked, in spite of his sea-going dress, less like a sailor than any man I ever saw afloat. Yet he was handy aloft, or on deck; and I have seen him on a windy day astride on the end of a yard, marline-spike in hand, doing his work as fearlessly and as well as the best of them. Whatever the men whispered together, I made up my mind that this fellow was the leader; and I read, out of my convict experience, in his face, that he was as reckless a ruffian as ever shook an unchained leg outside a gaol. Other things I noticed. The boatswain, who at first seemed to spend his whole time at the wheel, sometimes gave up his post to the third officer, and came forward. Then there were no whisperings; but the men kept aloof from him, all but Boston Tom, which was the name of the smooth-cheeked villain. Boston Tom always spoke to him, and spoke him fair, addressing him as “Mister Croil.” Ben Croil, as I afterwards learned to call him, was a man of five-and-fifty or sixty years of age; short of stature, thin and wiry; his hair cropped close, and quite grey; his face covered all over with crows’ feet; his eyes, which he had a trick of shutting up one after the other, while he looked at you, of a curiously pale and delicate blue. As a young man, Ben Croil must have been singularly handsome, as indeed he was proud of telling. In his age he had a face which you trusted; and as for his mind—but we shall come to old Ben’s inner-self presently. For his sake I love and respect the race of boatswains, quartermasters, and non-commissioned officers generally of Her Majesty’s navy, and of all the ships, steamers, and ocean-craft afloat. For if Merchant Jack is rude and rough, drunken and disreputable, his im-

mediate superior is, as a rule, steady as a lion, temperate as a Newfoundland dog, and as true as the queen of my heart.

There was a ship's boy on board—there always is. I have heard it stated that the bodies of ships' boys are inhabited by the souls of those who were once cruel ships' captains; other people think that they are possessed by the souls of ships' provisioners, ships' outfitters, pursers, navy agents, and crimps. I do not know which is the true theory. Both sides agree that the lot of all ships' boys is miserable, that none of them ever arrive at years of maturity, and that their sufferings, while in the flesh for the second time, are regulated by the evil they wrought in their former lives. Our boy was a curly-headed youngster of twelve; not a nice boy to look at, because he never washed, and was ignorant of a comb. I soon found out that he not only knew what was going on in the forecastle, but that he went aft and told the boatswain everything he knew; so one day I got that boy alone, while he was coiling some rope, and I said to him: "Dan, tell Mr. Croil that he may depend upon me. I know what you pretend to be so busy at the wheel for; I guess what you tell him; and I have seen you listening among the men. You tell Mr. Croil that he may depend upon me if he wants me." The boy fell to trembling all over, and he looked round carefully to see if any of the men were within hearing. As there was no one, he told me in a quick, hurried way, that if he was found out he would be murdered; that there was a plot among the men, headed by Boston Tom; and that he told everything—that is, as much as he could learn—to the boatswain. Also that the men knew perfectly well that the captain and the officers were all armed to the teeth; but that they were waiting for an opportunity, and would make or find one before long, for they were all mad to be back at the gold fields.

Now this information, which corroborated my suspicions, served to rouse me altogether from my brooding, and I began to think what a selfish, heartless creature I must be to sit in the corner, and mope over my own misfortunes, when there was this danger hanging over ship and cargo. And

being, as one may say, wide awake again, of course I remembered the young lady we had on board; and my heart grew mad to think of her falling into the hands of Boston Tom and his gang of ruffians. So I was glad to think I had sent that message, and resolved to do my own duty. However, there was nothing to do just then but to wait until I should have a message from the boatswain; so I sat in my usual place and waited.

The boy took my message, but no answer came that day at all. In the night a strange thing happened. It was fair-weather sailing, with the trade-wind blowing nearly aft, so that all sails were set, and the ship slipped through the water without so much rolling. I was sound asleep in my bunk, when I heard voices, as it seemed, in my ear. They were brought to me, I am sure, by a special act of Providence, for I never could understand, otherwise, how I managed to hear them. First, there fell a faint buzzing on my ear, which I, being drowsy and heavy to sleep, did not much listen to; then I heard words plain, and I listened; the conversation came to me in bits, but I made out enough. It was evident that the crew intended to mutiny—to choose the very next night, as I gathered (but I was wrong), for their purpose; and to carry the ship back to Australia, when they would scuttle her, and land as near the gold-fields as possible. Once there, they would separate; and so, every man for himself. And then I heard my own name mentioned, but I could not hear what was to be done with me. After that the voices were silent, and I lay awake thinking what to do next. Now this sort of talk was not likely to make me sleep, therefore I got up, dressed quickly and was ready, as well as broad awake, when, half an hour later, just after one in the morning, I heard steps and a whispering of men outside the door of my cabin, which was unlocked. "I'll do it at once," I heard a voice say, which I thought I knew for that of Boston Tom. "I will do it at once; and if anybody asks after him, say he must have fallen overboard. Where's the spike?" One of the two went away; I heard his bare feet on the boards. I stepped lightly out of the bunk, and put

my hand upon my knife—such a knife as diggers and up-country men used to carry—a knife that would do for any purpose ; at all events, I would sell my life as dearly as I could. The door opened, and I slipped to the side of the cabin, which, as in most old-fashioned sailing ships, was of a good size, though, of course, not a state cabin. I could feel the breath of the murderer, as he pushed his head in and called me. It was afterwards that I remembered how strange a thing it was that he should know my real name, because I had shipped under another. “You, Warneford,” he said, in a hoarse voice, “get up and come on deck. Wake up, do you hear? Come out, forging convict, and see the captain. Sulkin’ are you? Then this will wake you up.” I heard a blow—two blows—on the pillow of the bunk, and stepping swiftly behind him, I found myself on the forward companion in total darkness. I knew where I was, however, and the way. As quick as thought I ran up the ladder and over the deck, breathing more freely. Here I was safe, because it was not the watch of the men below, and at least there were three hours left for consideration.

There was nothing unusual in my appearance on deck at night. The air was hot and oppressive below ; on deck it was cool. I had often stretched myself on such nights on the tarpaulins, and slept as soundly upon them as in my cabin ; no one among the conspirators would think it strange to find me thus. Presently I pulled myself together a bit, and made up my mind, things being as they were, to go straight to the officer of the watch. He was walking up and down, a boatswain’s whistle hanging round his neck. When he saw me, he held it in readiness.

“Murder on board, sir,” I reported, as calmly as I could.

“Ay, ay,” he replied. “Very like! go aft and see the bo’s’n.”

It was a strange reply, but I understood, later on, that it had been already resolved to accept my services, and to trust me with firearms. So when I went aft, the boatswain pulled out a revolver, a knife, and some ammunition, which he had ready for me.

"There," he said; "do your duty by the ship, young fellow; we shall want you to-morrow night belike, or maybe sooner. But go below and turn in."

This I would not do. I waited for the officer, and begged him to listen to me again, while I told him my story.

"I take it, sir," said the boatswain, "that they may try it on to night. It isn't a bad dodge, you see, to get the day altered a bit, in case of treachery; and if you allow me, sir, I'll tell off the passenger for the young lady."

"Six pistols against twenty-five men," said the officer. "I think we can fight it out without waking the young lady."

But the boatswain urged that he had got everything ready for her; that she would be frightened down below, and might come up on deck in the thick of the fight, and get harmed; so that it was finally resolved to awaken her and bring her up on deck.

"Now, mister," said the boatswain to me, "you look like a man who's got his eyes open, and his head set on right end up; you listen to me. When the young lady comes on deck, I shall put her in this boat." There was a gig hanging to the stern davits; these were turned round in readiness for the boat to be lowered. "If things go wrong, as they will sometimes go wrong in this world's gear, lower away" (he showed me the rope), "and sling yourself in after her; then, if no one else comes, cut her adrift, because we shall be dead. When I whistle, or the chief officer whistles, don't wait, not even for a parting shot, but lower yourself away with her and take your chance."

The prospect of a fight steadied my nerves, and, after a careful examination of the rope, on which all might depend, and looking to my revolver, which was fully loaded and capped, I began to feel excited.

All this took time; the third officer was giving orders to the men on watch, which prevented them noticing me talk at the wheel; and it struck six bells, which was three o'clock in the morning, when I saw the young lady dressed and on the deck.

"What is it?" she asked; "tell me what is wrong, Mr. Croil."

"Be brave, young lady," he said; "nothing is wrong, I hope, but plenty may be. Here's the captain."

I noticed the captain's stern face as he came slowly aft, and I thought that, if the attack was made that night, some lives might be sent to a sudden reckoning. He was as steady as a rock.

"Miss Elwood," he said, "we expect a little mutiny, and we are quite ready for it; but we have asked you on deck to keep you as safe as possible. They have got no firearms, but we may have an ugly tussle. Let me help you into the boat—so. There are rugs and wraps, and you must make yourself as cosy as possible. To-morrow morning, if we get safely throughout the night, we will have them in irons; but if they try it on to-night, we must fight them."

The young lady obeyed with a shudder, but said no word. Then the captain looked round. The chief officer, with the third officer, was forward; with himself was the second mate, and behind him was the boatswain, steering the ship.

"How's her head, bo's'n?"

"Nor'-west by west, sir."

"And the trade straight as a line; the ship may navigate herself for half an hour. What's that, for'ard?" he asked, pointing.

"Mutineers," said the boatswain quietly.

"Steady all," said the captain. "You, sir"—he turned to me—"remember your post."

In the dim twilight of the starlit night, for the moon was down, I saw creeping up the companion for'ard, one, two, three, half a dozen black forms. With the others I watched and waited, my pulse beating quicker, but my nerves, I think, steady. Then there was a shout and a rush. We heard the crack, crack of the pistols of the two officers forward, and we saw them retreating before the twenty desperadoes, who, armed with knives stuck on sticks, marline-spikes, and hatchets, pressed onwards, with a roar, like so many escaped devils. The boatswain pushed me back as I made a movement with the captain.

"To your place, sir," he said, "and remember the whistle;"

but I fired my pistol once—for in the darkness I saw a figure creeping under the shade of the taffrail towards the helm. Perhaps it might be the leader, Boston Tom; but I could not see. I fired and he dropped; a moment after I heard the whistle of the boatswain. In an instant I let go the rope, and the boat dropped swiftly into the water.

In all my life I shall never forget that scene on the deck which I caught as I sprang over the side, and lowered myself, hand over hand, into the boat. The pistol-shots were silent now, and it seemed as if, with a mighty stamping and mad shouting, there were a dozen figures fighting one, while the battle raged over the agonised forms of the dying and the dead. Like a photograph the image was painted on my brain, and has remained there ever since. Sometimes still, after all these years, I awaken at night to hear the cries and oaths of the sailors, the crack of the captain's pistols, and to reproach myself for not having done more to save the ship. But I did my duty.

The young lady was crouched, trembling, in the stern of the boat. I reassured her with a word—there was no time for more, for almost as soon as I reached the boat another form came hand over hand down the rope, and I sprang up, pistol in hand, to meet him. But it was the boatswain; he had a knife, as he descended, between his teeth, and he held the rope for a moment in his hand. Half a dozen faces appeared in the blackness peering over the taffrail at him. The night air was heavy with oaths, shrieks, and groans. "Villains, murderers, cut-throats!" he cried, "you shall be hanged, every mother's son. I know your names—I've got your record in my pocket." He severed the rope with a dexterous sweep of his knife; instantly the great ship seemed half a mile ahead of us, as she slipped through the water before the strong trade wind. The boatswain shook his fist at her, as if the men on board could see and hear.

"There goes the *Lucy Derrick*," he said, "as sweet a clipper as ever sailed the seas, lost through a crew of mutineering, cut-throat villains. They shall hang, everyone—that's settled—they shall all hang, if I hunt them round the world."

"Where are the officers?" I asked.

"Brained, all of them—knocked on the head, and murdered. There, my pretty—there, don't cry—don't take on. If the captain's gone, he died in the defence of his ship—gone to heaven the captain is, with his three officers. In heaven, this minute. They've no call to be ashamed or afraid. Done their duty like men. No call; else what good expecting of a man to do his duty? And as for us, we've got a tight little craft, in the track of the clipper ships, or near it, with a supply of provisions and water, and plenty of room on this broad ocean in case bad weather comes on. Now, mister—what's your name, sir?"

"My name is Warneford."

"Good, sir. You'll allow me to command this craft, if you please, through my being bred to the trade—not a gentleman like you."

"Yes; but perhaps I am not a gentleman," I replied.

"Then you are a brave man!" cried the girl. "I watched you from the boat. I saw you shoot that man creeping along on the deck like a snake. And I owe my life to you, and to Mr. Croil. But, oh! it seems a poor and selfish thing to thank God for our lives, with all those good men murdered."

"Look!" cried Ben—I shall call him Ben for the future—"they're 'bout ship, the lubbers! Who'll teach them to navigate the vessel? Well, they can't sail over us, that's one comfort."

It was too dark for me to see more than the shape of the ship herself, standing out a black mass, with black masts and black sails, against the sky; but Ben's practised eye discovered that they were endeavouring to alter her course, for some reason of their own.

We were tossing like a cockleshell on the water, which was smooth, save for a long, deep swell. We were all three very silent; and presently I heard a noise.

"They are cruising in search of us," said Ben; "see they've reefed all. Well, it is too dark for them to see us before daybreak, and if they cruise about till then—Mr. Warneford, you have your pistol!"

There was but one chamber discharged in mine; Ben looked to his own. "We shall be able to speak a boat," he said after awhile, "at far-off quarters or close; and speak her we will to a pretty tune; but, on such a night as this, they might as well look for King Pharaoh's chariot as for the captain's gig. Heart up, my pretty! We'll stand by you; and in the morning we'll be off on another tack. Heart up!"

Then a curious thing happened—unlucky, as it seemed then. I have learned since, for my dear girl has taught me, to look on it as a special grace of Providence. Suddenly—having been before in a black darkness—we became as it were the centre of a great light; all round the boat there burst from the darkened bosom of the water lurid flashes of fire. The short crisp waves, as they rose to a head, broke, not in white sea foam, but in liquid fire; the swell of the ocean was like an upheaval of dull red lava; the sea was crossed and seamed with long lines of fire-like lightning, but that they remained or seemed to remain constant. As the boat rocked on the heaving deep, the flames, red and blue, shot from her sides; the skies, which were now overcast, reflected the light; the wind had dropped, and nearer and nearer still we could hear the dropping of the oars from the boat in search of us. It was the phosphorescent light of the Indian Ocean.

"Seems as if the Lord meant to have another life or two out of them murdering mutineers," said Ben. "Kind of beautiful, too, ain't it, miss? Lord, I've seen it off Peru, when there was no pirates and mutineers in chase, as bright as this! That was on board the *Conqueror*, hundred and twenty gun man-o'-war; and the chaplain preached next day on the Lord's handiwork. Here they come, Mr. Warneford. Steady and aim at the bow-oar; I take the stroke; fire when I give the word, and get the sculls ready in case of a miss."

They were about a quarter of a mile astern of us, pulling up hand over hand; because we never attempted—being in such bright light—to escape by rowing.

I sat in the bows, pistol in hand; Ben was in the stern, and the young lady amidships.

They hailed us to stop rowing. We were not pulling at all, so that no answer was necessary.

"A hundred yards, as I judge. Sculls out, and pistol ready to hand, Mr. Warneford. Don't let them run us down. Now give her headway; so, when I say 'Port,' pull with your left as hard as you know, ship the sculls, and let the bow-oar have it. Sit down, my pretty, shut both eyes, and say your prayers for me and Mr. Warneford, 'cos both on us needs them badly this very moment."

"Boat ahoy!" It was the voice of Boston Tom. "You, Warneford! You, George Warneford, convict and forger, 'vast rowing, and give us up the bo's'n and the girl, then you shall go free; if you don't, we will murder you as well as him."

We made no answer.

The boat came near. It was rowed by four oars, and—as I supposed—Boston Tom was in the stern.

"Run them down!" cried one of the crew with an oath. All the time I was pulling quietly, so as to keep a steady way upon her.

"Port!" said Ben suddenly.

I obeyed orders, and pulled my left. Instantly the gig swung round, and the heavy ship's boat shot past our stern; and, as she passed, Ben's pistol fired once, and a yell of anguish told that the shot had taken effect.

As for myself, I could not recover in time; but one of the four oars was disabled.

"Surrender!" shouted Boston Tom. "Easy, bow; pull, two; we'll run them down. Surrender, you convict Warneford! If you won't take those terms, I'll give you better. Come on board with me and I'll show you who really done it, and put you ashore safe and sound. I'll give you your revenge; I'll establish your innocence; I'll——"

This time, as they were turning, I let fly without orders, aiming at the bow-oar; and I hit him somewhere, because there was another yell.

They were within three-oars' length, but lying broadside on.

"Pull back to your ship," said Ben, "pirates and murderers, lest we take more lives! We've shot enough here for all your crew. Leave us, and wait for the time when I hang you all!"

In their haste they had forgotten to bring the officers' pistols with them. Perhaps they could not find the powder and shot. Anyhow, there was not a sign or sound from the other boat but the groaning and cries of the wounded men; and, after a pause, we saw the two who were left row back in silence towards the ship. That fight was over, at any rate. They passed away from the circle of phosphorescent light in which we lay, and so into outer darkness.

Then we were silent for the space of an hour or more. The phosphorescence died away, and the stars came out again. Presently in the east appeared the first faint streak of dawn, and Ben Croil broke the silence.

"What was them words as Boston Tom addressed to you, Mr. Warneford?"

"He called me convict and thief; and he said—— No!" Here a sudden rush of thought filled my brain as I comprehended, for the first time, all the force of what he did say, and I could speak no more.

"Convict! Thief!" Ben cried. "And you as steady as the best man of us all! Done your duty like a man! Well——after that——theer——"

Miss Elwood raised her head, and looked round in the grey of the dawn. She saw my shameful head bowed between my hands. Convict and thief!

I felt her gentle hand in mine as she murmured, "The night is far spent and the day is at hand; let us thank God for our lives, and for His great gifts to men of courage and fidelity. Let us pray to Him never to let us forget this night, to forgive us all our trespasses, and to help us to forgive all them that trespass against us."

So, in the lone waters of the Southern Indian Ocean, when the sun climbed up the rosy waves, the light fell upon a group of three in a little boat, kneeling together, and glorifying God through the mouth of that innocent girl; and of the

three there was one at least whose heart was humbled and softened.

"Amen!" cried Ben Croil, clearing his throat. "And now we will look about us."

CHAPTER III.

ST. PETER'S ISLAND.

WE looked about us. The day was upon us, and the sun, just risen, was already hot in our faces. The sea was calm with a light breeze blowing from the trade quarter. The ship had disappeared.

"No sail in sight, nor any shore," said Ben Croil, looking at a pocket compass. "Heart up, pretty." That was what he always said. "There's water on board, also provisions, though not what we might wish for the likes of you. I thought it might come to this, and I victualled her. There's land on the weather bow, if the Lord let us reach it. Land—an island. St. Peter's Island, where we'll be picked up when we get there. Mr. Warneford, sir, help me hoist the sail." We carried a mast and one small sail. Ben managed the ropes, while I steered under his orders. But first we rigged up, by means of the spare oar, some rough kind of covering to protect our passenger; and then we sailed on in silence, wrapped in our thoughts, while the boat danced upon the waves, leaving its little track of white foam behind it. A peaceful, quiet, and happy day. Helen tells me that she was not afraid all that time, nor was I. We were in a little open boat on the open sea; we were dependent for our safety on the continuance of calm weather; we were dependent for landing anywhere on old Ben's knowledge of the seas and recollection of the chart. He knew the latitude and longitude of the boat, making the allowance in dead reckoning for the time when we left the ship, and he knew the latitude and longitude of the nearest land. I drew a rough chart from his information on the back of a letter which Helen had in her

pocket. It had two places marked on it—the position of the ship *Lucy Derrick* at noon, September 15th, 1851, and the island of St. Peter.

It was a rough-and-ready way of reckoning, but I managed to place the position of the ship as near as possible where we left her, and Ben began to study the chart.

“Now, whether to put her head nor'-west-by-nor, or give her an extra point in a northerly direction, beats me quite. And there's currents which, in these little fair-weather craft, we ain't able to guard against, and the wind, which beats her on and off like. But St. Peter's lies over there. Heart up, pretty. We'll fetch land to-morrow, with the blessing of the Lord.”

It was Ben who served out the rations and the water—of which we had a keg—besides a bottle of rum and two or three bottles of wine, which had found their way among Ben's stores.

The sun went over our heads, and began to roll down into the west, but there was no life upon the waters except ourselves; no birds, no great or little fish, nothing to break the solitude. At a little after seven the sun went quite down, and in half an hour we were in darkness. The breeze freshened, but Ben kept up the sail, till I told him that I was dropping to sleep from sheer weariness. Then he took in the canvas, and resumed his place in the stern. Like a thoughtless and ungrateful wretch as I was, I threw myself into the bottom of the boat, and should have been asleep in five minutes but for our passenger, who called the crew to prayers.

She was our chaplain as well as our guardian angel; her sweet voice went up to heaven for us all as she sang the evening hymn. Then came over me—the first time for five years—that old feeling which is always new, that whether I lived or whether I died, all would somehow be well; and with the feeling upon me I laid my tired head upon the boards, and was asleep in a moment.

It was far advanced in the night when I awoke to relieve Ben. He had stripped himself of his coat, and laid it over the shoulders of the sleeping girl, and was sitting in his shirt-

sleeves. As I stepped lightly over her form to take the strings from his hand, he whispered me—

“Mate, was that true—them words as Boston Tom spoke in the boat?”

“I have been a convict,” I replied.

“How did he know that?”

“I cannot tell you; I wish to heaven I could.”

“What did he mean by saying he would tell you who really done it? Done what?”

“Done the forgery for which I was condemned. I am innocent, Ben Croil. Before God, I am innocent.”

He was silent a while.

“I can’t see my way plain. One thing’s got to be said. We may toss about in these seas till our water’s gone; we may get cast away; we may be wrecked. I ain’t so old but I can make a fight for life yet; and I ain’t so young but what I may look to be called first. You may be innocent of that there forgery, or you may be guilty. No concern of mine. Innocent or guilty don’t matter now; and whichever way it were, Mr. Warneford, the guilt of putting another man’s name to a bit of paper is like the guilt of a baby crying at the wrong time compared to the guilt of ill-treating the sweet young lady.”

“I pray God,” I returned, “that He will deal with me in His wrath if I shall deal with her unworthily—that He will punish me afresh for the deed I never committed if I prove myself unworthy of this charge.”

“That will do,” said Ben; “and, now we understand each other, I think I’ll turn in. Keep her head so. Steady.”

I let him sleep till the day was high. When the first cold breeze of the morning touched our lady’s face, she opened her eyes, and presently sat up beside me, and we talked—that is to say, she talked. She told me about herself, how her mother was dead in England, and her father had taken her out to Australia five or six years ago. He was a barrister by profession, but he had no practice, and a very little money. So he went to Melbourne, bought a little piece of land with a log-house on it, and tried to practise there; only no clients

came to him, or very few, and it was an uphill battle he had to fight. Then came the gold fever, and, like the rest of the world, he would be off to the diggings to make his fortune, while his child was sent off home out of the way.

All this history took a length of time to tell, and before it was done old Ben woke up with a start. He looked round the sea, as if to make quite sure that we had not gone to the bottom in his sleep, and then, nodding cheerfully to his charge and to me, began to scan the horizon to the north and north-west.

"Land!" he cried, pointing to what seemed a little bank of cloud, as big as a man's hand, rising out of the circle of which we were the centre. "Land ahead of us. Land thirty miles off. Heart up, my pretty, and a double ration for breakfast. Now, Mr. Warneford, the breeze is light, but we'll up sail and make what running we can. Maybe by noon we must get the skulls out."

Our captivity in the boat had been too short for us to feel any of the sufferings or disappointed hopes which make the story of a shipwreck so often tragic. We had suffered nothing beyond exposure on a summer sea for four-and-twenty hours. But the certainty of a speedy deliverance paled my cheek, and brought the tears to Miss Elwood's eyes.

"Let us have morning prayers," she said, "and thank God for this deliverance."

Ben Croil nodded. At the same time he cut an inch or so of tobacco for a fresh filling, and winked at me, as much as to say that we were not out of the wood yet.

We were not, indeed.

The land, as we drew nearer, seemed a long and low islet, without any hills, and covered with some sort of low-lying vegetation. It was less than thirty miles from us, because, while it was seven in the morning when it became visible, by ten we were within a mile, beating about for the best place of landing.

"The island of St. Peter?" said Miss Elwood. "I never heard of that island; tell me about it, Mr. Croil."

"No one never heard about it," said Ben, "except them as

made the charts, because no one never goes there. But they pass by, do the ships, and they will pick us up. It may be by to-morrow; it may be in a year's time; it may be in ten years' time. The whalers have been known to touch there, so there must be water; and where there's water there's birds, and where there's water there's fish; and so what I says again is, Heart up, my pretty. Luff, Mr. Warneford."

There was a little creek, up which Ben steered the boat; it opened into a round bay or harbour capable of holding half the ships in the world. On either side was the land, not in cliffs or hills, but in a low table-land. In one place a little cascade, ten or twenty feet high, fell into the blue water, with a rainbow hanging over it, and in another we saw the remains of a rude log-house, built out of boat-planks. To this spot we steered, and landed on a point of grey sand, up which we two men pulled the boat high and dry above the tide. There we disembarked our young lady. The first thing to do was to visit the log-house. The door had fallen from its rude hinges, which had been of leather; there had been a rough kind of window-shutter, which now lay on the ground; and the roof, which could never have been weather tight, was built up with planks, of which half a dozen had been blown off.

We looked inside. On the floor lay a skeleton. Dressed in rough sailor's clothes, the hands in gloves, the feet in great boots—a skeleton. He lay with his head upon his arm, as if he had given up the ghost painlessly. Beside him were a chair, a rude sort of table, and a bed. Shelves had been rigged up in the walls of the house, and on these stood stores. There were bottles still full of rum, tins of provision, cases of biscuit, cases of candles—all sorts of things.

We stood looking in horror at this spectacle of death, which greeted us on our landing as if it were a bad omen.

"Dead," said Ben Croil. "Dead this many a day; and no ships touched here all the time. Well, he's left his house to us, Mr. Warneford: we must bury him somehow."

"And are we to live here—here—in the same house?" cried Helen. "Oh, it will be like living in a charnel-house."

So it would; but what were we to do?

Finally we hit on a compromise. We would take down the framework, when we had buried the skeleton, and rebuild the house farther off. We looked in the dead man's pockets—there was not a scrap of paper to identify him by, not any morsel of writing anywhere to show who he was and what had been his history.

Ben Croil took the boots, the overcoat, and the gloves, as well as a watch and a purse, containing some English money. Then we dug, with the aid of a two-inch board, a grave in the sand, and laid the poor bones to rest until the Last Day. When we came back from our dreary job we found that Miss Elwood had been weeping—at least, the tears stood in her eyes; but she brushed them away, and made herself helpful, running backwards and forwards to the boat and bringing up everything that she could carry.

Our house was not finished for several days; but we made a tent for her, and slept in front of it ourselves, so that no harm might come to her except over our own bodies. In the daytime we were busy building. We found a bag of tools, part of the bequest of our poor Robinson Crusoe, which came in handy, as you may believe; and on the fourth day we had as neat a house, twelve feet high, and in the inside fifteen by ten, as you could expect to find. There was but one room; but we made two at night, by a curtain made out of the boat's sail. And when the house was finished we sat down, and asked ourselves, What next?

Miss Elwood, while we were building, explored the whole island. There was not much to explore. It was, as near as we could make out, a mile long, by half a mile broad. There were two springs in it, one of which formed the little stream which poured its water into the bay where we landed. There were multitudes of sea-birds running and flying about the place, whose eggs we took for our food. There was a sort of wood in one place, the trees of which were so blown down and beaten about by the wind that none of them were more than ten feet high, while the branches were interlaced and mingled together in inextricable confusion. The middle part

of the islet was, in fact, lower than the edges, and covered with grass; and at the western point there stood, all by itself, a rock, about forty or fifty feet high, round which hovered and flew perpetually myriads of birds.

I found a way to the top of this rock, and planted there our signal of distress—a long white streamer flying from the mast of the boat, which we managed to stick pretty firmly into a cleft of the rock.

This rigged up, we settled down to our new life.

The manner of it was as follows.

We began with morning prayers, said by our chaplain. Then breakfast. Then, in fine weather, Ben and I went fishing in the bay—not far from land, you may be sure, because Helen begged us, with tears in her eyes, not to risk being carried out to sea, and leaving her alone upon the island.

When we had luck, we would bring home enough fish for dinner and breakfast too. On such days we were sparing with our stores. Then for dinner, besides the fish, we had sea-birds' eggs, strong in taste, but not unwholesome, boiled or fried; and sometimes to vary the diet, we knocked down the birds themselves and roasted them. For firewood we had our little coppice to cut and hack at. Our supper was the same as our dinner; and, as the evenings soon grew cold and chilly, we used, after supper, to sit all three together round the fire of logs, and talk till Ben gave the word to turn in. Then evening prayers, and sleep till dawn.

Sitting before the fire in these long evenings of winter, when we did not care to waste our little stock of candles, it was natural that we should get to know each other, and it stood to reason that I should be asked to tell my story over and over again. At first I could see that old Ben distrusted me. A convict, he thought, must needs be a thief. Else how should he be a convict? He trusted me, however, with the young lady; he could depend upon me for my share of duty. But that story of innocence was, for a long time, too much for him; and it was a joyful moment for me when, one evening, Ben held out his hand to me.

"Theer," he said, "I can't help it; I've tried hard to help it, but I can't. My lad, you are as innocent as I am; you could not steal if you were to try. Show me the man as says you could!"

I went through it all from the beginning, picking up a thread here and a forgotten detail there. Miss Elwood, listening, was putting it together, until she knew as much as I knew myself.

Ben Croil, taking small interest in the details, contented himself with the main facts. It was enough for him that a great crime had been committed, and the wrongdoer never punished. While we talked in those long winter evenings he sat silent in his own corner with his head against the wall, until the time arrived when he could smoke the one half-pipe which he allowed himself for a daily ration.

And the story came to this. I tell it here because it was told so often during our stay on the island.

On Friday morning, August 18th, 1846, I went as usual to the office in Lower Thames Street, being then a clerk in the firm of Batterick & Baldwin, of five years' standing, getting on for one-and-twenty years of age, in the receipt of a salary, handsome for my age and standing, of a hundred and twenty pounds a year. I lived just south of the Borough, between the church and Kennington Common, having my little sister Ruth with me in lodgings. Ruth was at school all day, but had tea ready for me when I reached home, which happened, unless a press of work kept me longer, not later than six. After tea I went through her lessons with the child, and at nine o'clock she went to bed. In those days it was reckoned a bad sign for a young City man to be out late at night, or to smoke, or to frequent taverns; and there were no music-halls or such places. Day after day that was my simple life. A week's holiday in the autumn gave me a run with Ruth to Herne Bay or Gravesend, just to smell the sea. There were a few old friends of my father's whom we visited at regular intervals. I knew nothing of the dissipations and vices of the great City, and was as unsuspecting of them as if they did not exist. That was my life. The life of a hard-working City

clerk, hoping by long years of patient work to rise to the higher levels of good salary and complete confidence. As I have said above, I had already risen above the heads of some, my seniors in point of age.

Friday morning, August 18th, 1846, I was at the office door when the City clocks began striking nine. I was at my desk before the last stroke of the last clock had ceased. At ten I was sent for; Mr. Baldwin, the chief partner, wanted me. He was busy when I went in, and hardly looked up. He had a message of some importance to give me, which it would have taken time to write. He explained the circumstances at full length, and instructed me as to the form in which I was to set them forth. He was a precise gentleman, and liked to have things put in language as definite as possible. When I quite understood what I was to say, and how I was to say it, I asked him if there was anything else I could do for him. He looked round, and taking an envelope which lay at his elbow, half opened it and handed it to me.

"You may cash that little cheque for me, Warneford, if you will be so kind," he said. "I will take it in gold."

I took the envelope, without looking at the contents, and went away.

After executing my first commission, and receiving a satisfactory answer, I returned to the office, and my foot was on the threshold when I suddenly remembered the cheque. It was lucky, I thought, because Mr. Baldwin was in the clerks' office, and with him a gentleman, who I remembered afterwards was one of the partners in the firm of Sylvester, Cayley, & Co., our bankers. I ran to the bank as fast as I could, threw the envelope across the counter, and said, "Gold, please," as I pulled out my handkerchief and wiped my forehead, for the day was hot.

The clerk opened the cheque, looked at me with surprise for a moment, and then left the counter, while he went first to the door, and said something to the porter, and then walked into the inner room. He came back to me after two or three minutes, and said, "You must go inside, please, go quietly. It's all up at last."

Now I declare that I knew no more what he meant than a child; but I supposed there was some message for Mr. Baldwin, and I went into the inner room, filled with clerks, where the real business of the bank was transacted. Everybody looked at me oddly as I walked to the end at which the partners and managers were to be found. One of them seemed to be waiting for me; he pointed to a chair.

"Sit down," he said, "and wait."

The tone of his voice was not encouraging, but I obeyed and waited. Not a single thought crossed my brain that there was or could be anything wrong.

In ten minutes or so a policeman appeared, and I understood I was to go with him.

I thought it must be as a witness, and it was not till I was at the Mansion House that I knew I was arrested on a charge of forgery.

I laughed; it was so absurd that I laughed.

"Send for Mr. Baldwin," I said.

They put me in the dock for the preliminary examination. Mr. Baldwin gave evidence. He was shaken and agitated; he would not look me in the face. He broke down once or twice with emotion, but his evidence was clear. It had been discovered a day or two before that a system of embezzlement, by way of forgery, had been in practice for some months. The signature of the firm had been forged by some one who knew how to imitate the handwriting of Mr. Baldwin. A sum—in all amounting to upwards of nine hundred pounds—had been thus fraudulently obtained. To stop the forger Mr. Baldwin had been asked by the bank to add a private mark to his name. On this morning he had placed in my hands, he said, an envelope containing a cheque for twelve pounds, with his signature having the private mark, and he had asked me to cash that cheque at the bank. He swore positively that he had drawn that cheque, and no other, the day before—the counterfoil proved that—yet the cheque I presented was for eighty pounds, and it had not the private mark.

Observe, now, how the evidence grew more and more circumstantial. I had one cheque given me; I presented

another. Doubtless I must have torn up the first on the way. Then, an important circumstance: I came back from executing my commission, but did not cash the cheque. I got as far as the door of the office; I was seen to look in and retreat hurriedly. Mr. Baldwin was in the clerks' room, with one of the partners of the bank. I walked fast, or rather ran, to the bank. I presented the cheque for eighty pounds in a quick, anxious way, and I asked for the whole amount in gold. Naturally it was assumed that I was going to abscond with the proceeds of my last forgery. In fact, no question at all was raised as to my guilt; that was concluded from the very beginning. The Lord Mayor refused bail, and I was sent at once to prison, which I only left in order to be tried and convicted.

That was the story. I told it again and again, while the wood fire crackled on the hearth. Miss Elwood asked me for every detail; she talked the matter over and looked at it in all its lights, but she always came back to one point.

"Mr. Baldwin gave you a cheque which he had drawn the day before. How could he swear that the envelope had not been changed by some one else?"

And there was another point. It was assumed, though the charge was not pressed, that I had been the forger in the preceding frauds. Now no clerk could swear that I had presented any other of the forged cheques. Also it was proved in the defence that my life was quite quiet, innocent, and simple. Every hour of my day was laid open for the jury. No motive was discovered for the circumstance, no secret source of extravagance was ascertained; and it was found that the frauds had been committed by means of a cheque-book—got Heaven knows where—not that in the possession of Mr. Baldwin. No attempt was made to find out how I could have obtained another cheque-book.

But these were trifles light as air in comparison with the weight of the circumstances against me.

Always Miss Elwood came back to the same point.

"Who could have changed the envelope with Mr. Baldwin's cheque?"

I do not say that the discussion of my story occupied the whole of our time on the island of St. Peter. We had work to do all day, and were often glad to turn in soon after dark. In the summer we walked and talked outside, and we were always looking for the ship that was to give us our release.

At first we looked with certainty. Every morning I climbed up the rock and looked round on the broad bosom of the sea. Every morning I made the same gesture of disappointment. In a few months we got to look on deliverance as a thing possible, indeed, but far off. After two years we no longer dared to hope. In the third year we sometimes looked at one another with eyes which said what the tongue dared not utter, "We are prisoners here for life."

Our stores by this time had well-nigh vanished, save for a few bottles of wine kept for medicine, the only medicine we had. Old Ben was fain to smoke a tobacco compounded of herbs which he gathered and dried. We had learned by this time the resources of our island, and knew exactly what variety it afforded, and what was best for us to eat. There was plenty, such as it was. The birds did not desert us, nor the fish; there were eggs, there was a kind of wild lettuce, there was abundance of fresh water, and there was still a tin of biscuits for Miss Elwood in case she might take a dislike, as happened once, to the simple food of our island life. We fell into the way by degrees of arranging our days as if there was never to be any change. For myself, I almost think now that, but for one thing, I did not want any, so far as I was concerned. The one thing was that I had come to an understanding with Miss Elwood. It grew up by degrees. It was long before I ventured to tell her what I felt. The words were forced from me one night when, old Ben being asleep on his stool with his head against the fire, my sweet mistress was more than usually kind—if it were possible for her to be kinder at one time than at another—and I was more than usually forgetful of my condition. I remember—as if I should ever forget that moment!—that I took her hand as it lay upon her lap, and held it in mine while I looked in her face, and in her soft, sweet hazel eyes. I saw by the look in

those eyes that she knew what I was burning to say ; and I waited for the least token, any hint, that I was not to say it. It was a night in our winter, the English July ; outside the hut the wind whistled and the rain fell.

I told her in three words what I had to say, and I was silent again. She said nothing and I kissed her hand.

"Speak to me, darling, speak !" I whispered ; "if it is only to forbid me ever again to tell you what I feel."

"George," she replied, bending low towards me, so that I felt her sweet breath, and caught the glow of the fire upon her blushing cheek, "we have been together more than two years ; we have learned to read each other's souls. My beloved, if you have learned to love me, who am I that I should not learn to love you in return ? Tell me what is right to do. No, not now—not to-night ; think it over, and tell me to-morrow."

I passed that night in sleepless thought. Had I done wrong in speaking my mind ? And yet if we were to spend our lives in this forlorn and cast-away condition ! Could Helen marry me, if we were back in Melbourne or in London ? With what face could I ask it ; how go to her father ; how dare even to lift my eyes towards her ? But here it was different, and in the morning I came to some sort of conclusion. I told her what I thought was right for us both to do. I would not accept the great sacrifice of an engagement from her. I had been wrong, perhaps, in telling her my love, but it was too late to retract that. If relief came to us speedily, she should be free ; if none came within a year, we would marry on the island ; but should we before that time be taken from the place, we would only marry should it please God to make my innocence plain before all the world.

She accepted my conditions. She said that she would marry me when and where I pleased, but for the sake of her father. If we got safe to England my character should be cleared, if that might be, for my own sake. She knew me, she said, and that was enough.

We were happier, I think, after that. I began almost to hope even that no ship might come before the end of the

year ; but one day—it wanted but a month of the time—I saw, with a heart full of conflicting emotions, a whaler steering straight for our island. Ben Croil rushed up to the signal-rock, and began waving his streamers with frantic shouts.

Helen and I looked at each other, and the tears came into my eyes.

“Helen,” I said, “I am going back again to the world as a returned convict. I have lost you for ever.”

“No, no !” she cried, throwing herself into my arms. “Never, George. We will work together to solve this mystery ; and if it is never solved, my love and my husband, the Lord will find out a way. Only wait and trust ; and if the worst comes to the worst—if we are never to marry—we shall be brother and sister always. But, in all this wide world, do not forget that there is only one man whom I can ever love.”

And here I lay down the pen, and leave another to tell the story of how the sword of honour was restored to me.

CHAPTER IV.

DANCING AND DEPORTMENT.

SO far in the heart of the City as to make one doubt whether it has not got clean beyond the heart, and gone over to the other side, stands a street of private houses, at sight of which the rare and casual stranger wonders what manner of people they be who dwell therein. Their only knowledge of London squares and the aristocracy must be derived from America Square, to which the street is a near neighbour. Their knowledge of life must be taken from the Docks hard by, and from the Thames, which bears, within a stone's-throw of their doors, its fresh freights from India and far Cathay. They have the Tower of London for a subject of perpetual contemplation ; and by penetrating Thames Street they may sometimes make acquaintance with the exteriors of those who come from the unknown glories of

the western land—from the golden Belgravia and the ducal meadows of fair Tyburnia. But wherever they fare in search of the unknown and the picturesque, their lives are settled where there is a steady calm in the midst of turmoil. The outer world seems to belong not to them, nor its troubles; its fiercer joys they know not; the battle rages round them, but not in their midst; and the citizens who dwell in Yendo Street are a peaceful folk, mostly poor, and nearly all contented. Half way up the street, on the left-hand side, is a house which, exactly like the rest in all other respects, differs from them in a look of extreme cleanliness, which, with a freshness of green paint, makes it stand out from the neighbours as a house which claims the attention due to respectability of a high order. On the door is a large brass plate, on which is inscribed, "M. Lemire, Professor of Dancing, Calisthenics, and Deportment;" and on a large card in the front window appears the same statement, followed by the daring assertion that "References are permitted to the highest Nobility, Gentry, and Proprietors of Schools in the Kingdom." Side by side with this placard was another of smaller dimensions, with the simple word "Lodgings" upon it; for Professor Lemire added to his artistic pursuit the business of letting lodgings, whenever lodgers should be induced by the voice of fame, or by a calm consideration of the advantage of the situation, to settle for a time in the neighbourhood of America Square. It is proper to explain that hitherto—that is, since the hoisting of the placard, which was in a manner a flag of distress—no lodger had yet knocked at the door except one, and he had been, financially speaking, a failure. So the professor, albeit retaining the placard, thought little of his lodgings, and looked to his art for daily bread.

Art, however, at the East End of the City makes a precarious livelihood. There were a few private schools, where the professor's services were required at a very moderate remuneration, and a sprinkling of pupils could be got together to form a winter class, to which he yearly looked forward with hopes always doomed to disappointment. The dapper little dancing-master made out of all a very slender

income indeed, and the family table was frugal all the year round. The professor was, in this year 1855 of which we write, between forty and fifty years of age. His father and his grandfather had been dancing-masters before him, in the same neighbourhood, when there were yet wealthy merchants living there, and dancing was a serious accomplishment. His son Rupert, he said, should try other fields ; but for him—his lines were fixed. Professor Lemire was of Huguenot descent, and among the family treasures was the old sword which had been drawn at the great siege of La Rochelle ; but all the warrior-blood must have been exhausted at the period when the professor saw the light, for a more soft-hearted, tender, and sympathetic creature did not exist. He was a small, thin, and wiry man ; he had a clean-shaven face, bright black eyes, and black hair ; he dressed in black, too, with clothes fitting tight to his elastic limbs ; and he had one pet vanity—he was proud of his irreproachable linen. Madame Lemire was an Englishwoman, who had conquered the youthful professor's heart by an extraordinary devotion to his own art, in which, however, her success was but moderate. She was taller and a great deal heavier than her husband, whose genius she worshipped ; she was also as tender-hearted. And she was prolific ; no fewer than twelve children graced the board on which the family meals were spread, and often spread in an unsatisfactory manner. The children were all named in accordance with ancient Huguenot custom—either after old leaders of the cause, or after the Bible. The boys were Rupert, Gaspard, Moise, Elie, and so on ; the girls were Antoinette, Charlotte, Rebekah, and Marie. They were carefully instructed in the religion and language of their ancestors, so that they were bilingual, and talked French as well as English. They were also trained to consider that the queen and empress of all arts was the art of dancing ; that to dance well was a gift given to few, but to be aimed at by all ; and that their father was the greatest living master of the mystery. The eldest of them, Rupert, promised to surpass his sire. Before he could walk he could dance. Before he could talk he showed capabilities

with his legs, which brought tears of joy to his father's eyes. Long before he knew that speech may be represented, for purposes of persuasion, history, deceit, or love-making, by certain symbols called the alphabet, Rupert Lemire could reach a foot and a half above his own height with either toe, right or left; could lift either leg—not one leg only, mind you—over the head of every boy his own height; and could treat every limb in his body as if it were an independent organ, free to act exactly as it pleased, and unfettered by any of the ordinary laws of anatomy. He was taller by four or five inches than the father. He was eighteen years of age. There was nothing in the whole mystery of dancing which his father had to teach him; there was no harlequin at Christmas pantomimes at whom he did not secretly scoff in considering his own powers. He regarded dancing as the highest of all the arts, as has been said; and yet there was one thing wanting. Much as he loved the art, he loved the ocean more—that is, he burned to love it more, because he had never seen it; and it went to his parents' hearts to see the boy of so much promise rejoice in putting off the tight professional pants, and rush to the docks among the ships and sailors, clad in a suit of blue flannels, trying to look like the oldest of salts.

The second in order to Rupert was Antoinette. If it may be spoken of Mademoiselle Lemire with all respect, she was for elasticity and mastery over her joints almost the equal of Rupert. She was seventeen, and her function was to go to the ladies' school with her father, and help in teaching the girls. She was a great favourite, because, when she could get a clear stage, and no eyes but the girls' to watch her, she would execute all sorts of impossible things in dancing by herself. A clever girl, she had received from nature a mobile and sympathetic face—a face which exactly reproduced that of the first Lemire, hanging on the wall, the banished Huguenot; this old fellow, with the face which tried to be grim and was brimming over with fun. In fact, Antoinette, who was, like Rupert, a dancer born, resembled Michel Lemire, formerly merchant of Saintes, as much as a

daughter can resemble her father. As for the other children, they were like each other, in being, one and all, passionately fond of dancing. When ordinary children would have played games, the little Lemires played at dancing. When there was no school, the professor taught his children; all day long the sound of the kit was heard from the class-room, and the beating of the childish feet upon the floor, as one after the other practised and was instructed.

There was one other inhabitant of the house, a young lady, a girl of Rupert's age, that is, one year older than Nettie Lemire, and three years older than poor little Charlotte—the cripple of the family—a bright-faced, brown-eyed, brown-haired maiden, of tall and lissom figure, bright of eye, ready with speech and smile, happy in little things, the real sister of the children, the real daughter of the professor, the right hand of madame. Her name was Ruth Warneford. Eight years before this date, when she was a child of ten years old, she was brought to the house by a servant, who said that he came from the house of Batterick & Baldwin; that this was the child about whom the correspondence had taken place, and that the box contained all her things. So she was left. At that time a dreadful thing had happened to the child, but she was too young yet quite to realise how dreadful a thing it was. She had lost her only brother. When she grew older, and began to understand things, she comprehended that he had disgraced himself and was sent to prison; but no one told her the story. It was Mr. Baldwin, the man whose name George Warneford had forged, who took her, friendless and deserted, from the lodgings in Kennington, and sent her to Professor Lemire to be brought up with his children. He left her there because he found she was well treated and happy; and when she grew older he gave her a caution, which appeared to the little girl harsh and stern—never to breathe a word of her brother, never to think of him, and never to hope to see him again. The child obeyed, and among the other children only spoke of her brother, if she spoke of him at all, as one who had “gone away.” She was grown up, now, and she knew, alas!

whither he had gone. He had not passed away from her heart, but he was become a name, the mention of which touched some forgotten chord, and brought a feeling of ineffable sadness upon her soul. But that was seldom.

Ruth was at work now. She was a governess, earning her own little income, and paying the good people who were her second parents her own share of the household expenses. Mr. Baldwin wished her to be independent. "You will be happier so," he said; "work is good for the soul. I hear nothing but good of you, young lady; work hard, and eat the bread of industry. If you fall into ill-health, if you meet with any bad fortune, if you fail through any misfortune, come at once to me. I wish to help you, for the sake of your father, and of one"—here the old man's voice faltered for a moment—"one who was dear to me years ago, and who promised great things; but the promise was not kept. God bless you, Ruth Warneford!"

The girl understood that it was her brother—he who was gone—whom Mr. Baldwin had once loved, and she went away shamefaced. So that the shadow of this crime rested upon many hearts. The wreck of one poor human ship upon the ocean of life somehow drags down with it so many others; the sudden storm in which George Warneford went down disabled half a dozen gallant craft.

So Ruth Warneford became a visiting governess. The neighbourhood of America Square would not at first sight appear to offer the most desirable opening for such a profession. But then, if your ambition is bounded by the sum of eighteenpence an hour at the outside; if you do not mind trudging a mile or two from house to house; if you are ready to begin work at eight, and to leave off at six; if you do not look for pupils more genteel than the children of respectable tradesmen; and if you have youth and hope—you may find America Square by no means a bad place as a base of operations. Ruth not only toiled all day when clients came, but, when business was slack, filled up her time by teaching the younger members of the Lemire family; and the earnings of the girl were useful, and helped out the income of the family.

Indeed, had it not been for Ruth, the dinner of soup and vegetables must often have been exchanged for the dinner of dry bread ; for times were growing very hard with the professor. A dreary life for the girl ! hard work from morning till night ; and yet she endured it, and was happy. She had no holidays, and never went anywhere ; still she was happy—happy until one day came which shattered her little Castle of Delight.

It happened through her taking the post—which she thought great promotion—of organist to St. Ethelred's Church.

CHAPTER V.

MY BROTHER'S SIN.

AS organist of St. Ethelred's, Ruth had the privilege of practising in the church on such afternoons as were available. She used to secure the services of one of the younger Lemires, generally Charlotte, as blower ; and it was at such times her rarest pleasure to sit before the grand old organ for long hours, playing till the evening shadows turned the obscurities of the old church into deep blackness, and softened the stiff outlines of the kneeling marble figures. St. Ethelred's is a church spared by the Great Fire, and half forgotten when it was a mark of grace to destroy the images of the dead. Here lie the mortal remains of many a dead lord mayor and alderman ; here, kneeling gravely opposite each other, are the effigies of knight and dame ; here is a crusader with his legs crossed ; here is the mitred abbot, the crozier turned away from his face to mark that he was no bishop, but yet greater than bishop in the administration of his immense revenues ; here are monuments of all the centuries, from the fourteenth, stiff and mannered, but with lace-like delicate tracing, and once with bright colours, now all faded and forgotten, to the sprawling, tasteless tomb of the last century. There will be no more monuments in the old church, and, in course of time, the desecrating hand of the City architect will remove the venerable stones and the monuments, to

make room for a new street, or to build new City offices. But foremost among the tombs at present is that of old Alderman Sowerbutts. St. Ethelred's is, as an uneducated describer might fairly put it, two churches side by side. The scanty congregation sit in the right-hand church, which faces the altar, and in the north side stand the tombs, except a few of the older ones, which are in the south wall. The tomb of Alderman Sowerbutts occupies a large part of the north aisle to itself. It is a striking monument, containing many tons of marble, and surrounded by gilt railings. The worthy alderman died in the year 1691, just about the period when benevolence, as shown in the establishment of almshouses and institutions of charitable education, was invented. By his will he directed that the bulk of his fortune should be expended in the maintenance, first, of houses for the reception of twelve widows of liverymen from his own guild, and secondly, of a school where twenty boys and twenty girls, born in the parish of St. Ethelred, should receive a sound Protestant education, free of all charges. This was very noble, and pleased everybody, except the lawful heirs of Alderman Sowerbutts, who, for some generations afterwards, gnashed their teeth when they passed the church of St. Ethelred. There was another provision in the will of the testator, by which it was directed that the rector of the parish, accompanied by his churchwardens, one of his trustees, the clerk, the schoolmaster, and six of the boys, should, once a year, visit the church, open the tomb, and satisfy themselves that he—the deceased alderman—was actually there in the flesh, and not removed. Why this mortal dread of being taken out of the grave assailed the alderman it is impossible to explain. But the fact is so, and until a very few years ago the annual procession was made with great solemnity.

The church, old as it was, standing two feet below the street level, and four feet below the level of its little churchyard, piled high with the dust of five-and-twenty articulately speaking generations, was Ruth Warneford's private sanctum, when she could spare an hour. She and little Charlotte, the lame girl, would sit in the quiet old place by themselves,

alone and silent, watching the light from the painted windows play upon the deserted aisles, or talking in whispers, or the child would pump the bellows while Ruth played. They let themselves into the church by the vestry-door, and were secure against any chance visitors, while the busy city rushed to and fro among the alleys outside. No rural corner of green England, no country churchyard in the wildest country district, could match the solitude and loneliness of this old City place of worship on any afternoon in the week.

Stay—there was one visitor. Ruth Warneford kept her Saturday afternoons for organ practice; any other day's freedom was a holiday, to be sure, but a holiday which made an inroad into her slender purse. Twenty years ago the Saturday half-holiday was a thing just beginning to be talked about. Shops would not hear of it; merchants, as a rule, thought it a robbery of time due to them. Clerks hardly hoped to get it. But there was one clerk, at least, John Wybrow by name, a member of St. Ethelred's choir, who must have got his Saturday half-holiday regularly. He never missed looking in at the church at four o'clock on that day, when Ruth was playing over the hymns for the next day's service, and poor little Charlotte sat behind, plying the pump-handle, with an attentive eye to the position of the little ball at the end of the string, and listening while the roll of the mighty music echoed along the walls and high in the rafters of the roof.

John Wybrow came every Saturday for nearly a year. It was natural that he, being a member of the choir, and their most useful tenor—in fact, their only tenor—should like to try his part over beforehand; and who so able to help him as the organist? The visit might therefore be regarded as official, and performed in the discharge of duty. So far it was praiseworthy. Ruth, who was not yet eighteen when she became organist, at a salary of twenty pounds a year, at first regarded the appearance of the tenor, who was then about twenty-two, entirely in this light, being in no way put to confusion by the fact that he was young, good-looking, and of the opposite sex. Ruth had nothing to do with the foolish

thoughts which such a fortuitous concurrence of qualities too often engenders. Her life was full of real business. Then, when the exercises were finished, when Ruth had played over two of her pieces, while John Wybrow sat beside her and listened, what could be more in accordance with the dictates of natural politeness than that he should walk home with her, and help little Charlotte, who had to walk with a crutch, across the streets? It was not far to the professor's and John Wybrow, having succeeded somehow in getting inside the house, grew to abuse this privilege by staying to tea every Saturday evening. The whole family of the Lemires liked him except one. Rupert, the eldest, for some reason of his own, chose to take offence at his coming, and in confidence to Antoinette, expressed his conviction that Mr. Wybrow was a puppy.

On those evenings this simple family got through their bread and butter and tea with mirth and merriment.

And after the tea, of course, they would have a dance.

None of your meaningless scampers a deux temps, as was then the new fashion in frivolous England. Not at all. The professor, with grave air, assumed a violin in place of the usual kit, took up a position in the corner, and looking solemnly round, named the dances and the dancers.

"Minuet de la Cour—Mr. Wybrow and Miss Warneford."

Then would John Wybrow, with Castilian courtesy, lead Ruth, as grave as if she were dancing before a court, to her place, and with her go through the stately steps, while the children, seated round, criticised not unkindly, but with severity. This was not a rehearsal, but a performance, and the professor permitted himself no observations. The minuet concluded, the performers sat down, amid a chorus of remarks and commentaries.

"Pas de fascination—Mademoiselle Antoinette Lemire."

Then would burst upon the ever-delighted gaze of the children their eldest sister, in a miraculous robe of white muslin, clad in which, as in a cloud of glory, she displayed miracles of art. There were no criticisms upon her, only a rapturous round of applause, when with parted lips, bright eyes, and

panting breath, she finished the last pirouette as gracefully as Fanny Elsler herself.

"La Tarantula—Monsieur Rupert Lemire and Mademoiselle Antoinette Lemire."

"Danse des Exilés, Souvenir de la Rochelle."

This was a dance invented by the first Lemire who took to the dancing profession. It was executed first in solo, and then in full chorus, by the family altogether, assisted by Ruth and John Wybrow. Perhaps this finished the performance; perhaps there was a simple waltz; perhaps, too, at this juncture John Wybrow remembered that he had taken the liberty of ordering a few oysters for supper, and so on; the party finishing, as it began, in simple mirth and happiness, for Ruth was yet in that dreamy state of uncalculating happiness—a happy Fool's Paradise of innocence—to waken out of which is to realise one's humanity, with all its complicated forces of past, present, and future, its dangers and its passions. John Wybrow, during all these times, never told the girl that he loved her. Yet his hand-pressure grew always warmer, his voice grew always softer, his eyes rested always longer upon Ruth's fair head, and he became every week more and more the brightness and joy of her life. If this does not constitute love on both sides, what does? Yet the girl never thought of anything being said to alter the sweetness of this innocent pastoral; and the young man, for some reason, refrained from speaking the word which should break the spell.

But the spell was broken, and rudely.

It was a Saturday afternoon in early autumn. The splendour of the season showed itself on country-sides in waving fields of ripened corn, in apple orchards ruddy with their fruits, in woods where the trees seemed to hang down their heavy foliage in the still heat, as if weary with excess of pleasure. In London it showed itself by hot and glaring streets; by announcements of cool drinks in public-houses; and by a smell as of an immense bakery, where all the children's mud-pies, the cabbage stalks, the orange-peel, and the general refuse of a great city were being cooked in one large

oven. In the church of St. Ethelred it showed itself by an unwonted splendour of the painted glass. The colours which fell on the tombs and monuments were brighter than usual; the knight and dame who knelt opposite to each other, with hands clasped at head and foot of their common grave, received the crimson rays upon their heads, and lost for a while the rigidity by which their sculptor had tried to represent dignity. The sunlight played upon the organ beside the altar, and fell in a cloud of colour upon the patient face of poor little Charlotte Lemire, who was left there alone thinking. On the steps of the organ-loft sat, side by side, John Wybrow and Ruth Warneford. Mark that he has not spoken a word of love, nor has she thought of love, yet they sit like lovers, only not hand-in-hand.

The young man has been telling the girl of places which he knows, not far away, where stretch meadows, covered with flowers from spring to late autumn—the golden buttercup, the meadow-sweet, the wild convolvulus, and the cowslip—where there are woods, and streams, and corn-fields.

“Some day, Ruth, we will go and see them. Some day, when I am my own master.” He added the last words under his breath.

“Ah!” she sighed, “I have no holiday. It is wrong to be always wishing for things; but oh! John, I do sometimes long for a little change—just a few days in the country, such as I used to have when I was a little girl, before—long ago. It would be something to think of in the winter evenings, you see, especially if I thought I could go again.”

“Poor Ruth! Poor child! I wish I could do something for you; but I cannot—yet. I am only a clerk now. Will you have a little more patience?”

“Now, you will think I am complaining. But indeed, indeed I am not. I am very happy. I am sure I ought to be. Only now and then, when the sun is hot and the streets are close, and when young gentlemen like Mr. John Wybrow tell me of beautiful places, where rich people can wander and see sweet things—why, then, you see, it is hard not to feel a

little, just a little, discontented. And if I am discontented, what ought poor little Charlotte to be?"

"Poor Charlotte!"

"Look at her, John. She will sit there so long as I let her. To be in the quiet church soothes her nerves; she cannot bear the noise of the other children—she is happiest here. If I were a cripple, do you think I should be so patient as that poor child?"

Ruth shook her little head with a gesture of self-reproach.

What further line the conversation might have taken cannot safely be asserted, because it was then interrupted by a great trampling of feet, and noise of men in the church porch.

"It is the alderman's day," said Ruth. "Let us sit here quietly, and we shall see it all. The railings of the tomb are opened."

The doors were flung open, and there marched up the aisle a procession. First came the beadle, with the gold stick of office. He was followed by the rector, in full canonicals. After him, somewhat marring the effect by an ignoble limp, came the clerk. After the clergy followed the laity, consisting of two trustees, the schoolmaster, and a tail of six boys. A stray gentleman, not belonging to the procession, came in after the rest; and at sight of him both the spectators on the steps of the organ-loft started, and one of them, the young man, changed colour.

"There is Mr. Baldwin, my benefactor," said Ruth quietly. She did not look up, or she would have seen John Wybrow turn pale and then flush crimson.

Mr. Baldwin, leaning on a stick, seemed to be watching the ceremony at the monument. This took ten minutes or so, when the procession re-formed, and marched solemnly out of the church again.

An old woman, one of the almhouse widows, left the doors open for the stranger, who remained behind.

Mr. Baldwin, who did not appear to be in any hurry, began to look round the church, taking the monuments one by one.

"I must wait till he comes this way and speak to him," said Ruth.

John Wybrow bit his lips, but said nothing. He stood upright, arms folded, in an attitude which might have meant defiance.

The old gentleman, adjusting his glasses, came slowly along the north wall, reading the inscriptions, and looking at the tombs. Ruth watched him with a smile of amusement.

"How surprised he will be to see me here," she whispered.

He was surprised. In his surprise he looked, when he came upon the pair, from one to the other, dropping his glasses.

"John! Ruth Warneford!" he said. "What is this? what is this?"

Ruth stepped forward with a pretty laugh. "You are in my church, Mr. Baldwin," she said. "I am organist here."

He looked more surprised than ever. Angry too.

"Explain this, John," he said, without answering the girl.

Then Ruth began to feel that there was something wrong.

"There is nothing to explain, sir," said John. "This is Miss Warneford, whom you know. She is organist at St. Ethelred's. I sing here in the choir."

"So," said Mr. Baldwin, "that is all, is it?"

John Wybrow hesitated for a moment. Then he stepped forward to where Ruth was standing.

"No, sir," he said; "that is not all. This young lady knows me by my name, but she does not know that I am your nephew—that fact I have never told her. She learns it now for the first time."

"You learn it," repeated Mr. Baldwin to Ruth, "for the first time."

The words rang in the girl's ear like a warning.

"In your presence, sir, and in this sacred place, I venture to tell her, also for the first time, that I love her."

"That you love her!" repeated Mr. Baldwin. He took a seat on the steps of the pulpit, and looked at the girl with eyes of pity. "That you love her! Poor girl! Poor girl!"

"And in your presence I ask her if she will marry me."

Ruth, dear Ruth, forgive this rough speech, but my uncle forces it upon me. I know your goodness, your patience, and your trials. Come to me, my darling, and forget the trouble in a husband's love. Ruth, come!"

He had taken her by the hand and would have drawn her towards him, but she looked in Mr. Baldwin's face.

"Your nephew?" she faltered.

"My nephew," he replied.

"Ruth, my darling, come!"

She might have gone, she might have taken that single step, and fallen upon the breast that was yearning for her, but for the look in the old man's eyes.

"Remember!" he said solemnly.

Ruth snatched her hand from her lover.

"Do not remember," cried John passionately. "You have remembered long enough. It is cruel to remember longer. What has the past to do with the present?"

"Everything," said Mr. Baldwin sadly—"everything. Ruth Warneford, I do not blame you. It is not your fault that my nephew has met you. It is his that you did not know what kind of conduct his has been towards you."

"What conduct his has been!" repeated the young man fiercely.

"Ask that in ten years' time, if I am living, and if you have found time to reflect. Girl! between you and my nephew there stands a ghost—the shadow of a great wrong."

"Alas! I know it," sobbed Ruth, "I know it."

"There is no ghost. It is the dream of a morbid brain, dwelling too much on things long gone and forgotten," said the young man. "Ruth, come out of the shadows into the light."

"What was done by one of your blood eight years ago separates you from me and mine unto the third and fourth generation," said the old man.

"What was done yesterday matters nothing to-day," pleaded the young man. "Ruth! do you think I have not known your story? Long the tale of George Warneford has been

familiar to me—since I was a boy at school. What has it to do with you and me, and with our love?”

“It stands between you,” said his uncle.

All the time Ruth looked steadily at the old man. There was no hope there, only a stern justice, before which she trembled.

“I have been kind to you, Ruth Warneford,” he said; “what the world calls kind. But let that pass. Remember, however, that it pains me even to hear your name pronounced. I shall not relax in whatever help you may want; but, I ask you in return—it is a little thing—to send this young man away.”

A little thing! Why, all in a moment, when John took her hand in his, she knew that it was her life, her happiness, her all, that she was asked to give up.

She made no reply.

“The idle attachments of youth,” Mr. Baldwin went on, still sitting judicially on the pulpit stairs, while the guilty pair stood before him, “the idle attachments of youth are quickly made and quickly forgotten. You will laugh at this in a month, Ruth.”

“Ruth!” the other pleaded, “Ruth! remember our happy days together in this old church; our evenings at your home; the sweet talk that we have held together—are these to go for nothing?”

“What is love,” asked the old man, “that it is to override the most sacred obligations, and make duty a mockery? Children, could you prosper with the memory of the past ever before you?”

“The past! Oh! the past! Let the dead bury its dead,” cried John. “Ruth! if you will be mine, we will turn our backs on this city and its hateful memories; we will go to a new country where no one can reproach us; we will live where the firm of Batterick & Baldwin is not known.”

“Think of it, young lady,” Mr. Baldwin said bitterly; “he is prepared to sacrifice his future and his own happiness, your future and your happiness—to say nothing of me—in order to gratify his whim. Yes, sir, a whim; the fancy for a pretty

face. Pshaw, sir! what do you know about goodness? Do you think I don't know that this is a good girl? Do you think I should treat her like this if I did not know it?"

Ruth took the old man's hand. He stood up as if to receive her, and she laid her head upon his left arm; perhaps it was to hide her tears.

"My mind is made up," she said. "John, Mr. Baldwin is right. I can never marry you. Heaven knows that until this day, even when I did not know that you were his nephew, I never thought of marrying you or anybody. What I feel now—that matters to no one"—she stopped herself proudly. "The disaster that fell upon me, eight years ago, is between us; we can never pass that barrier. Farewell, John, and try not to think about me any more—never, any more."

"Ruth," he said, "hear me again. It is not my fault that this disaster fell upon you. It is not yours."

"No," she cried; "it is the will of Heaven, and we must bear it."

He turned fiercely upon his uncle.

"You have robbed me of my wife, sir," he said, "and you have lost your nephew. This day I leave your firm. The partnership that I was to have had on my next birthday—that partnership, on which I hoped to marry the sweetest and noblest girl in all the world—you may give to whom you please. Leave your money where you wish. I will never see you or speak to you again, unless it be to take my bride from you." He walked half down the church, leaving the girl clinging to his uncle's arm.

Suddenly a thought struck him, and he returned.

"Ruth," he said, with softened voice, "in this sacred place, before this altar, I have one more thing to say. In the years to come I shall wait for you. This foolish fancy, the persuasion of this selfish old man, who would keep alive the miserable past to poison the present, who sacrifices two lives to gratify his revenge, will pass. I shall wait for you alone, till I hear that I may come. Remember, I can marry no one but you."

He waited a moment for an answer.

The girl left her hold of Mr. Baldwin's arm, and moved to

the altar. There she fell upon her knees and prayed. John Wybrow still waited. When she rose again her face was lit up by the light of the western window, which poured full upon her, by her hair lying loose about her head like an aureole, so that she looked as a saint might look.

"When what is impossible becomes possible, John, when George Warneford's guilt is changed into innocence, I shall be free to marry you. And not till then."

John Wybrow knelt at her feet and kissed her unresisting hand. Then he turned and strode out of the church.

"Brave girl! brave girl!" cried Mr. Baldwin.

"Leave me in the church," she replied faintly. "I go in and out of the vestry door; leave me here. I have to think—to collect myself a little."

The old man looked at her with eyes full of pity.

"Forget that headstrong boy," he said; "he will be sorry afterwards for what he said to you as well as to me. We cannot undo the past, Ruth, but we may fight it down. We must bear our punishment, but we may bear it worthily, until it becomes a crown of glory. You are a good girl."

He left her. And as he walked down the aisle Ruth might have noticed, had she looked up, that his form was bowed, and that he trembled as he went. But she did not look up. She stood still, clasping her hands before her; and, when the church-door shut with a clang, she fell down upon the steps weeping and sobbing aloud. The echoes of the many-raftered roof took up her crying, and from among the silent tombs, from the dim recesses of the darkening church, there arose a voice and a whisper as of the dead, who weep with one who weeps.

Then little Charlotte Lemire, who had been forgotten all this time, crept sorrowfully from her nook within the organ-rails and sat down beside Ruth's head, waiting.

Presently Ruth felt her little fingers about her, soothing and petting, and she looked up.

"Ruth, dear Ruth. O Ruth! what can I do?" cried the child.

"Nothing, Lotty." Ruth arose and put on her hat. "Let

us go. Please tell nobody anything at home, only that Mr. Wybrow will not come here any more, and that I have got a headache and am gone to bed."

That Saturday night there was silence at the professor's. The violin was not brought out; nor was there any dancing; and the children were sent to bed early. Also Nettie and Lotty spent the evening, as did their mother, in tears.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROFESSOR LETS HIS LODGINGS.

IT was almost two months after the dreadful day at St. Ethelred's, when the quiet of Yendo Street was disturbed by the clattering of a cab on the stones. It stopped at the professor's, and the occupants, consisting of a lady and a gentleman, with an old man of seafaring aspect, knocked at the door.

To Madame Lemire's intense surprise, they asked for lodgings.

Lodgings! She remembered their first venture in that line of business, and went in search of the professor. The professor, then engaged in teaching the youngest, aged two and a half, his earliest steps, also remembered that disastrous episode in their life, and hesitated.

The lady, who was a young lady, spoke for the party—

"We are easily satisfied," she said. "We shall want three bedrooms and a sitting-room, but we require very little attendance. We will give you a reference to a respectable lawyer, and we will pay the rent for three months in advance."

The professor looked at his wife—here was a chance—and the rent three months in advance! In five minutes the party was upstairs, and madame, with Nettie, was devising means of stowing away the displaced children.

Meantime the professor went in search of the lawyer referred to. As for his lodgers—who gave the name of Mr.

and Miss Elwood and Mr. Croil—the lawyer knew all about Miss Elwood. The young lady's father had died in Australia, at the diggings. But his little house and garden, now in the centre of a city, suddenly became great, and sold for a large sum. Yes, Mr. Lemire might depend on Miss Elwood. It was odd that he named Miss Elwood, and never spoke of her brother; but that, after all, was nothing; and the professor went back with a light heart, and a full assurance of his rent for a whole year to come. He found Miss Elwood sitting among the children, and at home with all of them; and it was very funny, the children said, that when Ruth came in she knew her at once, and said, "You are Ruth Warneford," and then shook hands with her. Because, they said, how should she know Ruth, when she did not know Nettie?

In a few days the new lodgers were so far settled in the house that they seemed to form part of the family. The elder man, Croil by name—who slept on the second floor, and took two of the boys to share his room when he found that they would otherwise have to sleep on the landings—was clearly an ancient mariner. He dressed in navy blue, and wore a fur cap, of curious and sea-going cut. He was a little man, with soft and dreamy eyes, of a light blue; and with a very quiet manner of speaking. He generally carried in his left hand a cake of tobacco, with an open knife in his right: and he cut the tobacco slowly as he went.

At regular intervals he smoked: once before breakfast, once after, once on the point of eight bells, once after dinner, once towards tea-time, and once after, once before supper, and once after. "But not," as he remarked to young Rupert Lemire, the eldest-born, "not to be for ever with a pipe in your mouth—as if you might be the stove of a lighter. That's not the way, my lad, for them as earns their bread upon blue water."

He used the pavement of the street—at such times as it did not rain—for a promenade or smoking saloon; when it was wet, he betook himself to his own room—a place which the children soon learned to regard as the home of all unimaginable delights; and they called him, after the first day,

Ben, by his special request. The last pipe of the day Ben took in the first floor front, with the other new members of the party.

They were a quiet pair. The man, about thirty years of age, looked older, by reason of the scattered grey hairs in his full brown beard, and the crow's-feet round his eyes. Across his forehead nature, or some trouble, had drawn a long deep line; the hair had fallen from his temples, leaving a wide and open brow; his lips were flexible and mobile, but they were hidden by his heavy moustache and beard; his eyes were hazel, and had a dreamy far-off look, with a gaze as of one who waits and expects; his voice was low, and he spoke seldom.

His sister, unlike him in face—so much unlike him that you would not have been able to trace even a faint family resemblance—resembled him in one respect, that her eyes, which were large and of a hazel tint, had the same far-off look, and, in repose, gazed out upon space like her brother's, as if waiting and expecting. She was tall, and of such a figure as the Graces love; her head, crowned with its glory of brown hair, was of such a shape as Canova would have desired for a model; her face outlined as if by some poet inspired with the sister art of painting.

It was a face born for mirth and gaiety; but the gaiety had gone out of it, and left it prematurely grave. A look of care dwelt upon it for ever, save when she turned her eyes upon her brother, and then the sweetest smile lit up her features and effaced the lines of trouble round her mouth.

Observant members of the Lemire household made out, in addition to their personal note, a few other prominent facts as regards their lodgers. One was that they seemed all three utterly careless as regarded their food. On washing days, that is, on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, when the mother of the family and the maid-of-all-work were engaged with the linen of the household, they accepted, not murmuring, as weaker brethren murmur, cold boiled mutton, with or without potatoes; they drank nothing but tea, coffee, or milk. except Ben, who, once a day, towards the evening, visited

the nearest public-house with an empty pannikin, which he brought back full. They went out, the brother and sister, a good deal in the daytime, and at night they always sat side by side, with joined hands, before the fire, looking into it. Ben Croil at such times sat with them, his legs gathered up under his chair, his head against the wall, sound asleep. Sometimes in the morning, too, the pair would sit silently for hours together. Once Rupert Lemire, the eldest son, heard the lady say, after one of their long silences—

“George, if Boston Tom is living anywhere in the world, we must find him. If he is dead, we must find who and what he was.”

And on another occasion, Nettie Lemire, going to make the lodger's bed, saw her on her knees by the bedside, in an agony of tears, crying passionately, “O Lord! how long?”

There was only one other thing remarkable about the new lodgers, which was the way in which Miss Elwood sought Ruth Warneford's society. Now at this time Ruth was melancholy, by reason of her shattered love-castle, and would fain have sat in silence; but she could not decline the invitations which Miss Elwood showered upon her, to dine with her, to take tea with her, to sit with her, to walk with her. And it was difficult to resist the kindness with which these invitations were offered, and the sympathy with which the girl was gradually encouraged to respond to these advances. Little by little Ruth found herself talking with Miss Elwood—Helen, as she called her—as if she had been her oldest friend. Besides, the room upstairs was a retreat from the chatter of the children, and a quiet evening with her new friends rested her after a day's hard work at teaching.

They got into the habit of sitting together, talking in a low voice to each other, while Mr. Elwood, a restless man, paced up and down the room in silence; and they talked as if he were not there, because he never spoke, and never seemed to listen.

And, one Sunday afternoon, Helen Elwood told the girl a

thing which made her heart leap up, and brought such joy to her as she thought could never come again.

It was a very quiet Sunday afternoon. After dinner old Ben might be heard marching up and down the pavement of the street, on the sunny side, where the east wind was not felt. With him was Rupert Lemire, and they were discoursing—that is, Ben was discoursing—on ships, and storms, and sailors' lives afloat. Helen and Ruth sat by the fire, the latter lying with her head on the elder girl's knees. Mr. Elwood sat in the window, silent and grave, looking at the group of two.

"And you are quite alone, poor child?" Helen asked. "No brothers, no sisters?"

"I had a brother once," said the girl, colouring painfully. "But he—he—went away eight years ago, and I have never seen him since. Poor George—poor dear George!"

She laid her cheek on the hand of her new friend. Helen felt the tears fall fast.

"Do not speak of it, if it pains you," she went on, glancing at her brother, who sat rigid, pale, and with trembling lips.

"Yes, let me tell you all; and then you will not say that I have deceived you. Listen. We were so happy, George and I together—only we two, you know. In the evening he came home from the City, and I used to make the tea, though I was such a little thing. There never was so kind a brother, nor such a good man; because now, you see, I know what young men sometimes are. Oh, me! how cruel it all is to think of! For our happy life was suddenly stopped."

She paused a moment while Helen soothed and carressed her.

"They said he forged Mr. Baldwin's name, and robbed him of his money. How can I believe it, Helen? If it was true, what did he do with the money? And yet—and yet—I once went to a place that I heard of in the City, and looked in a file of the *Times* till I found the report of his trial; and it was all so clear! He must have done it. And still I cannot believe it of my brother; for he was so steady and so true."

"And you have never heard anything of him at all?"

"Never anything at all," the girl said. "I do not know where he is, or if he is living."

"His name was George—George Warneford?" Helen replied slowly. "My dear, I think I can tell you something—not much—about him. And that little is good. There could not be two George Warnefords in Sydney at the same time. It is three years ago and more that I knew of a prisoner of that name—he was a young man of five-and-twenty——"

"George's age—he is ten years older than I."

"A prisoner for forgery——"

"Yes, yes."

"Who obtained his release and a free pardon for a noble deed he did."

"O George—my brother—tell me what he did."

"He risked his life to save the lives of others; there was mutiny in the prison, and murder. Desperate men, made more desperate by the knowledge that their revolt was hopeless, had the lives of the prison warders in their hands; in a few minutes it would have been all over with them. This prisoner—this brave man, who was convicted by an unanimous jury, after five minutes' consultation, for a wicked and treacherous act, my dear—faced almost certain death to save them. He did save them, and they released him for his reward."

Ruth seized her hand and kissed it.

"Go on, Helen; tell me more."

"I have very little more to tell you. But if it will comfort you, I can tell you what the prison doctor said to him when he left. He said, Ruth, that his trial showed the clearest case against him that ever was made out against any man, but that his life and character belied the circumstantial evidence. He said he believed him innocent."

Ruth gave a great gasp.

"Innocent? Oh, if it were only so; what would matter all our sorrow and all his suffering, if only he were innocent?"

"Mind, George Warneford always said that he was innocent. The doctor was the first to believe it. Afterwards, I have heard that others also believed him innocent."

"Why does he not write to me? Why does he not come home to me?"

"Perhaps he does not know where you are; perhaps he does not know how you would receive him. For, Ruth, your brother has lost the most precious jewel of life—his honour."

"But, since he is innocent——"

"How does he know that his sister loves him still? Who has written to him out there to tell him so?"

"Can I ever cease to love him? O Helen! if he were to stand before me this very moment, and hold out his arms, I should be more happy than I have been all these eight years that I have lost him."

In the window, in the shades of the early December evening then darkening the room, the very man of whom they spoke sat still and upright. But his hands trembled, and his face was distorted by some violent passion. Helen looked towards him and made a gesture of invitation. But he shook his head. Then she spoke again to the weeping girl.

"If he came to you a beggar in reputation, an outcast of society, heavily laden with the weight of these years of disgrace——"

"Unmerited disgrace," she said.

"With nothing to say to you, but that he was innocent—you would love him and cling to him against all the world, against Mr. Baldwin, against the kind people of this house?"

"Ah!" said Ruth, "I have but one brother. You have told me that he is innocent and brave. I am proud of my poor brother."

"And if he came to you, bearing in his hand the proofs of his innocence, what then, Ruth?"

"It would be too much happiness," she sighed. "Helen, why have you sought me out to tell me this story? I know—

I know—that you are keeping something back. You have come to this poor lodging to see me—me. I am sure of it. You have come with a message from my brother. Tell me all—tell me all.”

“Yes, dear, you have guessed. We have come—my brother and I—from Australia, to see you. We come in your brother’s name, and in your brother’s behalf. We have a task before us—to establish, if we can, his innocence. There is but a slender, a very slender hope, of our doing that. But, O Ruth! believe it with all your heart; cling to it as to an anchor; thank God for it every morning and every night. He is innocent—George Warneford did not commit this wicked thing. We are trying to prove it, but we may not succeed; and, whether we succeed or not, you shall be restored to your brother.”

Ruth was silent again—thinking. Then she lifted her eyes, bright with tears.

“You know him, then?”

“I know him, dear Ruth.”

“Tell me what he is like.”

Helen glanced at her brother.

“He is greatly changed from what you remember him. To begin with, he is eight years older, and he has suffered. You would not know him. Try not to fancy what he is like, but think of him now and always as a good and honourable man, who has had to endure a grievous wrong.”

“I will—I will. And, Helen, why do you and your brother try to do him this great service?”

Helen did not blush as she replied, taking the girl’s face in her hands and kissing her.

“Because, my dear, I love him, and I hope to be your sister.”

“My sister? You will marry him? And he loves you? O Helen!”

“Yes,” she replied, looking at her brother; “he loves me. The most patient, the most deeply-injured, the most honourable man, the kindest and noblest heart in all the world,

loves me. Ought I not to be a proud and happy woman, dear? And you must love me too."

Ruth threw herself into her new sister's arms, crying and laughing. It was too much for her, this great and new-found happiness.

"Hush, dear! Hush, my dear!" said Helen. "I have told you too suddenly. There—lay your head upon my shoulder and calm yourself."

She went on talking in a soft voice at intervals.

"We must keep our secret to ourselves. Not even the professor must know. Only you and I must work at this difficulty ourselves—you and I, and my brother; we three. I will tell you, to-morrow, what we have to find out, and you must help us. We shall be very happy in the years to come." She looked again at her brother. "You and I, and George—all three together. Happy, whatever happens; happy, if we have to keep all to ourselves the knowledge of his innocence; happy, if the world never restores to him his honour again. We must live for one another, dear. You must think of meeting him, Ruth, as if you were meeting a soldier coming home from victory. For he has had a fierce fight, and has escaped unwounded. He has been in the very depths of sin, among the most evil men in the world, and has come out pure of heart. We are here, we three, to win back his honour or to sustain him; and you will do your part?"

As the girl lay with her face buried in Helen's bosom, and her arms round her neck, the man in the window rose and stepped noiselessly to bend over the pair, his eyes full with love. Helen turned her face upwards and met his lips with hers, while with a hand that trembled he stroked the long hair which lay on Helen's shoulder, and belonged, not to her, but to Ruth Warneford.

Then began a cling-clanging of the City bells for evening service. From almost every street there came the ringing, loud and discordant, or sweet and musical, of the multitudinous City churches—a voice of invitation to tens of thousands where there were only hundreds to hear it.

Then Ruth lifted her head, and rose. She looked about her strangely, trying to bring her thoughts back to their usual channel.

"I must go to church," she said; "I play the organ at St. Ethelred's. I must go to church."

She did not look fit to go to church, for her eyes were dazed and her hands trembled.

"I will go with you," said Helen. "Let me play for you to-night."

"Yes, yes," the girl cried, "we will go together. I shall be able to play as soon as I begin. The organ soothes! and we will pray together, you and I, side by side, oh my sister! for George." She turned to the man. "You will come too, Mr. Elwood, will you not? You know him, and you love him, or else you would not have travelled all this way with Helen. Come with us to the church."

"I will come," he answered. Why did he bow his head, and sink upon a chair.

"My mind is full of my brother," Ruth said; "George is everywhere to-night. I heard his voice in yours, Mr. Elwood; his voice that I thought never to hear again. Let us go to the church."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISSING LINK.

IT had been easy for Helen Elwood to find Ruth Warneford; for, happily, the people with whom George Warneford had once lodged were still in the same house and knew whither the child had been taken. Also the position of the place suited them better than any other could have done, for they were near the docks, and it was at the docks—either of London or Liverpool—that they hoped to find some clue to the men of whom they were in search. Where Mercantile Jack mostly finds his way, there Ben Croil told them they would some day or other light on one of the mutineers of

the *Lucy Derrick*. "Granted," he said, "that they got safe ashore—which isn't likely for a set of drunken swabs—they would make for the diggings; and after a spell there, get back one by one to the port of Melbourne, and so on board again, and make their way to London." It was a slender chance, but it was their only one; and so old Ben went down regularly every day, and hung about, boarding the ships as they came in, and stepping forward for a look round; but he never found any of the *Lucy Derrick* men. When Ben was not hanging round the St. Katherine, the Victoria, or the London Docks, he was to be met with in the neighbourhood of Limehouse, Stepney, or Poplar; and, in the evening, he would be seen as far afield as Ratcliff Highway, always going round with his cake of tobacco in one hand and his knife in the other, whittling away, and looking about with his mild blue eyes, to see how they got along on board without him. On board the ships he always asked after a roll of names, which he carried in his pocket, but knew by heart. The list ended with the name of Boston Tom. Some of the men were known, but they had not been seen or heard of for years; but no one knew anything of Boston Tom.

One day as Ben was cheapening a bandanna in the High Street of Whitechapel—the part of London where that costly article can be most readily obtained—there passed him a long, lean, and slouching lad of sixteen. The boy was going slowly, with eyes bent on the ground. Ben dropped the bandanna, and seized Rupert, who generally accompanied him in these excursions, by the arm.

"Now," he said, "if you want to do a good turn for Miss Warneford, you've got a chance. Step behind and follow me. I know that boy; and he won't, likely, tell me what I want. If I leave him, you follow him quietly. Find out where he goes, and where he lives. Don't let him go out of your sight for a moment; and if it's a week, you go after him; and you stay with him."

"Ay, ay," said the mercantile-marine aspirant; "I understand."

"Got any money?" asked Ben.

"How should I have any?" returned Rupert the penniless. "Did I ever have a shilling in my whole life?"

"Five shillings will do," meditated the sailor. "There would be suspicion if it was more. You follow him up, and stand drinks to the extent of that five shillings; and find out somehow—without asking, you know—where Boston Tom may be, 'Boston Tom,' mind—that's the name you've got to stick to. That's the important thing. Now drop behind, and watch."

The old man hurried after the youth, who was now a dozen yards ahead, and, catching up with him, put his hand upon his arm, holding that limb tight.

"Ship-boy of the *Lucy Derrick*, Dan'l Mizen, I've lighted on you at last."

The lad turned ashy pale, and tried to drag his arm away.

"You—Mr. Croil! O Lord!"

"Ay, my lad, and glad to set eyes upon you again. No, Dan'l Mizen, you don't get away from me. See that Bobby over the way? I've only got to call him; and it's murder on the high seas."

"Oh, don't, Mr. Croil!" he whispered; "don't talk in that awful way. I was down below all the time, I was; and I give you information, I did."

"You did; and what I always says to myself is this: 'Young Dan'l,' says I, 'give that information, and it come in handy. When the trial comes on, if I'm there I shall up and let 'em know that the information was given, and how handy it came in.' Your neck's safe, my lad, if I'm there. If not, why, then, o' course, you'll have to swing with the rest."

"The rest!" echoed Mr. Mizen, with a half laugh. "There ain't any rest."

"What! All gone but you?"

"All gone but me and Bost—and one other of the crew."

"Swear to that, boy; and if you tell me lies, I'll rope's-end you till you'll wish you'd never been aboard any ship in all your life; that blue you'll be all over."

The boy, whose face showed him to be what he really was—the most arrant cur and coward in existence—burst out blusterously, “Rope’s-end me, will you, Mr. Croil? Wait till you try that game on.”

“Ay, will I! And I’ll begin on the spot, if you jaw me. Why, you dirty, measly—— There, go on with your story! All the pirates is drowned, then? Pity, too!”

“I’ll tell you all the truth, Mr. Croil—s’help me, I will. We lost in the fight—that is, they pirates and mutineers lost—eight men in all, out of five-and-twenty; that left seventeen, and six of them were wounded; that left eleven. Well, they used me orful, they did. All your latherins, Mr. Croil, was pan-cakes and plum-duff compared to the latherins I got all round from them devilish murderers. Things went bad with the nagivation too, and they couldn’t keep her no course nohow.”

“Lubbers all!” said Ben. “Go on, my boy; steer as truthful as you know.”

“Then we got weather; and then, you see, we had to take to the boats. There was two boats, but one stove in; then there was only one left. We hadn’t time for any provisions; and after the fifth day they began to eat each other. Gawspel truth, Mr. Croil!”

“Sarved them right! Worse than being hanged. But I’d rather ha’ hanged them.”

“Last, there was only left four of us.”

“One of them four was Boston Tom?” said Ben.

The boy hesitated.

“Well, one was—I remember now—one was; but he was nearly dead when we were picked up; and he was one of them two that died two days afterwards.”

“That’s a lie,” thought Ben; but he said nothing. “So, now, only two are left,” he asked, after a pause. “Who may the other be?”

“He was Maltese Dick, Mr. Croil,” the boy replied very quickly. “Him with the black hair and the arm tattooed all over; and where he’s gone I don’t know, and can’t tell you.”

"Ay, ay! And where do you live now, you Mizen boy?"

"I've left the seafaring trade, sir. I'm just come up to London to look round like; got no home to go to yet."

There was a malicious twinkle in the young man's eye as he spoke. Ben looked up quietly—he still held him by the arm—and watched him.

"Then you don't live anywhere handy about here?"

"Laws, no, Mr. Croil! Certainly not, not by no means. Whatever made you go for to think that I would live about here?"

They passed, at that moment, a low sort of lodging-house and sailors' tavern, with a bill in the window: "Lodgings for single men and mariners."

Unless Ben Croil was grievously deceived, the lady at the door of this hostelry made a sign of recognition as the lad passed.

"So," Ben thought, "that's the crib, and that's where Boston Tom is to be heard of."

"Well, Dan'l Mizen," he said aloud, "you'll find me most days down at the docks. You mind, come to see me, and no harm shall happen to you; you forget to come, and as sure as my name's Ben Croil, you'll swing for your share of the *Lucy Derrick* mutiny. Swing is the word, Dan'l Mizen!"

He made mental note of the house and number, and turned back.

Mr. Mizen looked after him, with a countenance full of perplexity and dismay; and, after first scratching his tousled head, and then shaking it ruefully, pursued his own way in the opposite direction, with a dejected, not to say a hangdog, expression in his very shoes. Presently there passed him a lad of about his own age, dressed in blue flannel, and looking—although the flannel was shabby—a gentleman. He had long legs and a springy walk. As he went along—sometimes a little ahead and sometimes a little behind Mr. Mizen—he stopped occasionally, and looked about him, as if in search of something. Mr. Dan'l Mizen contemplated this waif—a gift of Providence, evidently fallen quite into his hands—for a quarter of an hour or so; and then, Mr. Croil being well out

of sight, he shouldered up to the stranger, and jerked out, looking the other way—

“Lost your bearin’, mate?”

“That is it,” replied the stranger; “lost my bearin’.” I was told by a party in the country that I was to come to a house in the Whitechapel Road—but I’ve forgotten the number—where they’d take me in, and do for me, and find me a ship.”

“That’s lucky, now!” said Mr. Mizen. “Why, I’ll take you to the very place, and it’s close by; you come along o’ me.”

Daniel Mizen led the way. Oddly enough, his steps took him to exactly the very house where Ben Croil had noticed the lady at the door, and had remarked, besides, that she seemed to know his young companion. It was indeed the truth that the ex-ship-boy lived in this place of resort. How he lived, on what honest industry, or by the exercise of what native wit, was not immediately apparent.

He conducted Rupert to the door, and introduced him to the landlady—a woman with a red face, and dressed in a cotton gown, looped up so as to show a rich amplitude of petticoat underneath. She stood, with arms akimbo, contemplating human nature as it passed, with eyes of hungry defiance. Men and women walked along, children ran by, but they were not her prey. Of all kinds and conditions of men, Mother Flanagan—not an Irishwoman by birth, although of illustrious Irish descent—loved a sailor, and especially him of the mercantile marine. She extended her affection beyond the narrow limits of party and country, embracing in one comprehensive sweep, and gathering to her breast, Englishman, American, Negro, Lascar, Malay, Greek, German, or Norwegian. All alike were dear to her, and she was dear to them—in the long run, very dear. She housed her favourites; she provided them with food, society, amusements, and drink; and when they left her hospitable house, it was, the censorious said, with empty pockets, and with “coppers” so hot that it took a week of sea-breezes and compulsory temperance to cool them.

"Yes, I can take him," said Mrs. Flanagan, "if the young gentleman will pay a deposit."

"I've got five shillings," said Rupert.

"Hand it over," said Mrs. Flanagan.

"Mrs Flanagan," called a voice from the inside room, "send that boy in here, five shillings and all."

The voice was hoarse and strained; it was followed by a chest cough which lasted long enough to tear the patient to pieces, and also was followed—a thing which was quite natural in that horrible den—by a volley of oaths.

Rupert Lemire thought himself in very queer company, but he reflected that they would not probably murder him for the sake of five shillings; and he obeyed the invitation to enter the house. By the fire, in a low room reeking with tobacco, there sat in an arm-chair a man of singular appearance. He was decorated with a scar on the right side of his mouth, which made it look as if it had been twisted up on that side. He had bright black eyes, very close together, and a long receding forehead; his face was smooth and hairless, and his cheeks were hollow and sunken. His empty pipe lay beside him on a table, which was also graced by a half-emptied glass of rum and water.

"Come in, youngster. What's your name? Where do you hail from? What do you want? Now then!"

Rupert thought of the initials on his handkerchief.

"My name is Robert Lumley," he replied, with a little hesitation, taking a name which belonged to the family butcher—an importunate person who was always bringing sorrow upon the household by demanding payment. "I come from—from Manchester, and I want to go to sea."

"How much money have you got?"

"Five shillings."

"Give it to me to keep for you. I live here. This house belongs to me, not to Mrs. Flanagan. I'll take care of your money for you. I hope it's honestly come by. We're very particular in this house, ain't us, Dan'l Mizen?"

Daniel made no reply.

"And if we can't get you a ship all at a day's notice, young

shaver, I suppose you could find some more money by writing for it, couldn't you? Guess you'd better come to me for advice. Five shillings, you see, it won't go fur. Two days, or thereabouts, if you don't drink. To be sure, there's the 'long-shore clothes; you can make a good swap out of them, and nick a trifle into the bargain."

He had another fit of coughing, followed by another volley of oaths. Then he proposed a game of cards, and they sat down to a friendly hand of all-fours, in which Mr. Mizen took a hand. Rupert was not astonished when, after half an hour or so, he was informed by the man with the cough that he had lost all his money.

"Five shillings," said the host, jingling the two half-crowns. "It's a trifle, but there, it's something to pass the time. Young feller, you've cleaned yourself out pretty sharp, you have. You'd better write that letter for more money at once: nothing like coming to the point. You, Dan'l Mizen, go and fetch the ink, and some paper. S'pose you've got a father?"

"Yes."

"And a mother? Yes? That's good. I like a mother. We'll pitch it strong. You just write what I tell you, and nothin' else."

The paper having been brought, Mr. Pringle—for this, Rupert had learnt in the course of the game, was the gentleman's name—proceeded to dictate: "'My beloved parents.' Got that down? 'Beloved and justly offended.' No; easy a bit. Let me think. Now then, 'My beloved parents, I made my way up to London after leaving home, and arrived here yesterday. I am deeply sorry for the trouble that I have caused you in running away, which I intended for to go to sea, but am now fully persuaded of the folly of my conduct, and will go back home, to do what you please. I am staying with truly Christian people, and have spent my all. If it were not for their charity, I should now be starving. I owe them two pounds already, and shall want three more to get my clothes out of pawn, which I am in rags, and to get home again—third class parliamentary—which is better than

I deserve. So please send me a post-office order for five pounds, payable to Thomas Pringle, at the Whitechapel post-office, the same to be called for. Your affectionate son, Robert Lumley."

This was Mr. Pringle's dictation. The following, however, is what Rupert Lemier really wrote:—

"DEAR OLD BEN,—I'm in the queerest crib. They've robbed me of my five shillings, and a fellow here thinks I'm writing for five pounds more to my parents in Manchester. What a game! My address is 1344A, High Street, Whitechapel, and my name is Robert Lumley, but you must not write to me. The name of the proprietor of the crib is Thomas Pringle. He is a cut-throat-looking villain, with a scar on his right lip, and two eyes close together. If he had any hair on his face he would be like a wolf. I like the fun.—Yours ever, R. L."

"Is it all wrote?" asked Mr. Pringle.

"Yes," said Rupert, quickly folding and placing the letter in an envelope, the only one on the table.

"Let me look at it."

"Can't now, it's folded and gummed up; give me a penny for a stamp. I say, Mr. Pringle, what fun it is; what shall we do with the five pounds?"

"We'll have a spree, my boy, you and me together, in this blessed little crib. Now go and post your letter, and come back when it's done. You can't get into no mischief, because you've got no money."

That was true; but Mr. Mizen, nevertheless, seemed to think it desirable to attend him, unobtrusively, to the post-office, and to escort him, after the letter was duly posted, back to No. 1344A. There they found some sort of a meal in active progress, and two or three other guests, although the appearance of the food did not, as in some circles, cause the disappearance of the tobacco. On the contrary, those who had fed, or who were about to feed, went on smoking; those who were feeding kept their pipes by them, and between helpings attended to the preservation of the spark. The cloth removed, so to speak, every man ordered what liked him best, and the evening's sports set in with the usual severity.

Other guests arriving, of both sexes, the tables were cleared away, and dancing began.

Rupert sat quietly enough, watching and listening, until the fiddle began. Presently his legs began to twitch. An elephantine performer was occupying the floor with a step made up of the cobbler's dance and the sailor's hornpipe. Rupert stepped up to him.

"Let me show you how to dance," he said, smiling superior.

He did show them how to dance a hornpipe; then he showed them the sword-dance with the poker and tongs; then he executed a figure all of his own invention, in which he lifted his legs over the head of every lady and gentleman present, to their unmixed joy and rapture; and then, snatching the fiddle from the hands of the inebriate musician, he threw himself into his place, and played a country dance for them till they danced as if they had been the rats of the Pied Piper himself.

Never before had Mrs. Flanagan witnessed such dancing, such excitement, or such thirst.

Said Mr. Pringle to the worthy landlady, upon retiring to rest: "The boy's worth a mint of money. We'll keep him. When he gets an answer to his letter I'll fix him up right away. There shan't be such a house as this not this side of Lime'us. There, old gal!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HELEN PLAYS A TRUMP.

"THERE was a fellow-clerk at the office," said George Warneford, after reading Rupert's letter, "named Samuel Pringle; I remember him well."

"A fellow-clerk!" cried Helen, "and of that name. What kind of man was he?"

It must be owned that, in the further examination of the Warneford case, by far the most intelligent and active investigator was Helen Elwood. Whether his long confinement had

dulled his brain, or whether he despaired of success, George Warneford himself was mostly irresolute, and sometimes, as if a cloud rested over his brain, he was silent and apathetic.

"Try to think, George; what manner of clerk was he?"

"We were in the same room," said George. "He was my junior by a few months in point of years, but he had entered later. I do not know what his family connections were, nor anything of his habits, because he lived in a different part of London—somewhere up the King's Road, I think; but I know his name was Samuel Pringle."

"George, if this Thomas Pringle, whom the men called Boston Tom, knew your face—if he knew your story—if he knew, as he said, who did the thing—what other clue is more ready than the connection of Samuel Pringle with Thomas Pringle? And if Thomas knows, then Samuel knows as well."

"I believe you've got it, miss," said Ben. "How can we find out about this Samuel Pringle?"

"They could tell us at the office; at least they could tell us if he is there still," said George. "But who is to ask?"

Helen thought a little.

"I will go," she said, "I will go and see Mr. Baldwin myself. George, we had better take Mr. Wybrow into the same confidence as your sister; with Rupert and John Wybrow both working for us we ought to do something."

George sighed.

"Have faith, dear friend"—how many times had poor Helen said these words, as much to strengthen her own faith as to sustain his—"have faith and hope. We are nearer now than ever we were before. We have found out the man who knows, and now we have only got somehow to make him confess."

Rupert's letter arrived of course in the evening. Helen Elwood had a busy time. She had first to represent to the professor and Madame Lemire that their eldest-born, though he would not return for a few days, was in reasonable safety, and might be expected to take care of himself, and was engaged in a matter requiring secrecy and confidence, which might be of great advantage to Ruth. She had to calm

down the boiling fury of old Ben, who, now that his enemy was within his grasp, longed to bring him up, and saw himself, in imagination, reeling out the evidence that was to hang him. She had to find a correspondent in Manchester, a matter effected by means of a gentleman of the seafaring persuasion—friend of Ben's—who would send Rupert the five pounds asked for, with a suitable letter. She had to calm the eagerness of Ruth, who wanted a posse of constables at once to arrest the man and make him confess then and there. Also George showed, when once he was alive to the situation, unusual agitation and excitement.

"I will go myself, Helen," he said, "to Mr. Baldwin."

"No, George, you will stay quietly at home; I can go, because I can talk without excitement. Let me go alone; keep quietly at home."

But all night she heard him pacing backwards and forwards in his room over her head.

The end at hand! It was too much to hope for; it was a thing which he had never dared in his heart to look forward to. Much as Helen loved him, even she could not altogether understand the revulsion of feeling which the new prospect of his rehabilitation caused him. After eight years of suffering and disgrace—after returning to England with an assumed name, in hiding, so to speak—after the agony of knowing that his sister was suffering with him and for him, and yet that he could not take her to his breast, and tell her who and what he was! And then, another thing; he had schooled himself to expect disappointment. How was an eight-year-old crime, proved upon himself, to be transferred to another man? How could the proofs be collected? From what quarter should they come? And who would put them together?

And now, suddenly, he was asked to face a solution in which the impossible was to be made possible. Within a mile of himself was the man who knew all about it. It only was left to discover if that man would be ready, or could be made, to confess.

Towards morning George Warneford dropped upon his bed

and fell into a heavy sleep. Helen below heard his footsteps cease, and fell asleep herself. At nine o'clock he was sleeping still, when she set forth with a beating heart on her mission.

She knew the office of Messrs. Batterick & Baldwin so well, through George's frequent descriptions, that she knew the way right through into Mr. Baldwin's private room. She passed, unchallenged, and without hesitation, through the three rooms. The clerks looked up from their work for a moment at the strange apparition of a young lady in the office; but the young lady did not belong to them, and they went on with their writing. Helen turned the handle without knocking, and entered. Mr. Baldwin was alone at his desk.

"I am a stranger to you, Mr. Baldwin," said Helen, in answer to his word of inquiry, "and if I give you my name you will be no wiser. There is my card, however, and I will write on it the name of my lawyers for your reference, if you wish."

"Pray take a chair, young lady."

Mr. Baldwin read the card, and waited for further information.

"I will come to the point at once, Mr. Baldwin. I believe you had a clerk named Samuel Pringle."

"I have still."

"Is he a useful clerk—one whom you could trust?"

"Really, Miss"—Mr. Baldwin looked again at the card—"Miss Elwood, I hardly see my way to giving you the character of my clerks."

"Mr. Baldwin, believe me, I have no idle motives in asking that question; and, if you will answer it, I will tell you beforehand why I asked it."

"There is no reason, after all," said Mr. Baldwin, "why I should not answer it at once. Pringle has been in my employ for about fourteen years. I once thought he would turn out a smart, active clerk, but he has disappointed me. He is not sharp, and he suffers from fits of nervous abstraction which will prevent his advancement in the world. But he may be trusted."

"Do you know his family?"

"We never take a clerk into this house without knowing his family."

"Then you can tell me if he has a brother."

"I daresay I could have told you years ago, but I have forgotten now."

Helen played her trump card.

"Would you allow me to ask him, in your presence, a single question? It is not impertinence or curiosity, Mr. Baldwin; indeed—indeed it is not. If you only knew how much depends upon that question!"

Mr. Baldwin touched a hand-bell. "Mr. Pringle," he said.

A moment later Mr. Pringle appeared. He was a tall young man, with stooping shoulders, and a quick, nervous way of looking about him. Also, as he spoke, his fingers played with whatever was near them. His eyes were too close together, which gave him a cunning appearance, and his forehead was long and receding.

"Pringle," said Mr. Baldwin, "this young lady wishes to ask you a question."

Mr. Pringle bowed; the lady's face was strange to him.

"I wish, Mr. Pringle," said Helen, "to ask you when you last heard from your brother Thomas."

The pale face of the clerk turned white, his fingers clutched convulsively at the back of a chair behind which he stood. He trembled from head to foot; his mouth opened, but his tongue refused to speak.

Mr. Baldwin looked at his clerk with a kind of distress; What did it mean, this terror at so simple a question?

Helen repeated it, never taking her eyes off his face.

At last he spoke.

"Not for five years or more. Tom went abroad."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, I do not," he replied firmly.

This was a point gained. The man clearly did not know that his brother was in England.

"Had your brother any distinctive mark by which he might be known?"

The man hesitated.

"I cannot give information which may injure my brother," he said.

"Very well," replied Helen; "there are other people who may be injured by your silence; you had better think of yourself first."

The trembling began again; then he plucked up courage.

"I need not think of myself," he said, "not in that way, but Tom had enemies; however, there was a mark on the right side of his mouth—the scar of a wound he got from a knife: he may be known by that mark."

"Thank you, Mr. Pringle," she replied; "I now know all I want to know, except your address. I shall perhaps call to see you in the course of a day or two."

"That will do, Pringle."

Mr. Baldwin dismissed him, and turned to his visitor for explanation.

"I think it will be best to tell you something, Mr. Baldwin," said Helen. "Do you remember St. Ethelred's Church, four months ago?"

"Surely."

"Ruth Warneford told her lover there, in your presence, that she would marry him when the impossible proved possible—when George Warneford's guilt was proved to be innocence."

"What has that to do with your visit to me?"

"Everything! Mr. Baldwin. I am here in England to make the impossible possible. I am here to prove a convicted forger a wronged and innocent man!"

Mr. Baldwin looked at her in silence. It was in a harsh, constrained voice that he answered—

"That is a fool's errand. Time was when I would have given ten years of my life to have proved George Warneford guiltless, but that time has gone by."

"We shall see, Mr. Baldwin," said Helen, smiling; "mean-time, do you want to know where he is now?"

"In prison, wretched boy, at Sydney."

"You have not heard, then—you have not read in the papers that he has long since obtained his release?"

"No."

"Shall I tell you for what reason?"

Helen told. In her narrative the heroism of her lover lost nothing. Her eyes sparkled, her voice trembled with emotion, her bosom heaved.

The old man, catching little of her enthusiasm, only sighed.

"Why do you come here," he asked angrily, "to raise doubts when I had certainties? Why, if I had had the least, the smallest spark of hesitation about the lad's innocence, I would never have rested, night or day, till I had proved it."

"You would not," replied the girl. "Oh, I am sure you would not! But there was no room for doubt, and the plot was too deep: the accidental circumstances were too conclusive. But think, Mr. Baldwin, can you wonder, if you would have done all this for a doubt, that I——"

"But what is George Warneford to you?"

"He is to be my husband," she said. "If you for a mere doubt, would have known no rest till that doubt was cleared, what should I, his affianced wife, do who have no doubt, but a certainty—no hesitation, but a conviction, that my lover is innocent?"

She burst into tears, but only for a moment.

"Bear with me, Mr. Baldwin. You loved him once yourself; you will love him again yet."

She drew down her veil.

But the old man rose before her, his hands out, feeling, as it were, in the darkness for support.

"Tell me," he cried, "tell me—George Warneford innocent? Is it a truth?"

"It is a truth, Mr. Baldwin. It is the whole truth, and in a few days, with the help of God, who has helped us so far, I will give you the proofs of his innocence. Meantime give me, please, Mr. Samuel Pringle's address. Thank you; and help me further by taking no notice of what I have said, and by keeping to yourself all that has passed."

Mr. Baldwin promised.

An hour afterwards a messenger went in to the chief. He

found him sitting at his table doing nothing, looking straight before him. He spoke twice to him without getting an answer; and then Mr. Baldwin turned to him, and said, in an agitated voice—

“Innocent? Then God forgive us all.”

CHAPTER IX.

FULL CONFESSION.

MR. BALDWIN'S words were conveyed to the outer office, and, being curious and inexplicable words, were repeated among the clerks. To them the story of George Warneford was an old and almost forgotten thing, so that they did not connect it with Mr. Baldwin's expression. One of them, however, when he heard them, trembled and shook. He was so nervous and agitated that he could do no work that morning. His hands could not hold the pen. His mind would not take in the meaning of the words which he had to read, the figures danced before his eyes; and, amid the buzz of those who came and went, he heard nothing but the voice of Mr. Baldwin, which repeated, “Innocent? Then God forgive us all!”

Forgive whom? Samuel Pringle's cheeks were white when Helen asked him for news of his brother; but his very lips were white when he thought of what these words might mean to himself.

Might mean? Did most certainly mean. There was no doubt in his mind at all that the young lady was come to Mr. Baldwin's about that old business of George Warneford's, a business which had ruined his own life and destroyed his peace. If the innocent man had suffered, much more had he, the guilty, endured tortures of repentance and helpless remorse. There was no way out of it now, except to confess and take the consequences.

He sat out the dreadful hours full of unspeakable terror from ten till one, and then, taking his hat, went out when his turn came to take his dinner.

One thought always comes to the guilty—the thought of flight. As he emerged from the office where he had expected all the morning to feel the hand of arrest, it occurred to him that he might escape. He looked up and down the crowded thoroughfare; no one, he thought, was watching him; he would hasten to his lodgings, pack up a few things, and be off, somewhere—anywhere—out of danger.

Excellent thought! He was a thrifty young man, who did not spend the whole of his small salary, and had a little money with which he would pay his fare to America. He would write to the office and say that he was called away on urgent business, but would be back in a week; then he would not be missed. Once in America—once on the way to the West, he would be safe from pursuit, and they might prove whatever they liked about himself and George Warneford.

Excellent thought! He lived at Islington. He took a cab, and drove to his rooms in hot haste, mad to be away from this dreadful fear which stung him like a hornet. And not only to be rid of this fear of detection and arrest, but also of the slow devouring fire of remorse, which had never left him for one moment since the day when George Warneford was sentenced for a crime which he never committed.

So good and wise a plan did it seem to him, so practical and so original a method of shaking off the inconveniences of remorse and anxiety, that, when he stepped out of his bedroom, portmanteau in hand, and saw who were waiting there to frustrate his manœuvre, he fell fainting on the floor.

His visitors were John Wybrow and the young lady he had seen in the office. For Helen lost no time. She drove from Mr. Baldwin's straight to John Wybrow's chambers; and in as few words as she could, told him what was necessary for him to know.

Said John Wybrow promptly, "I know that fellow Pringle. He is a cur and a sneak. I always thought he was capable of villainy, and now I know it. He is the man who did it; not his brother at all. Now, Miss Elwood, the first thing he will do is to run away."

"Run away!"

"Just that. They always do it, fellows like Pringle. He hasn't got the pluck to stay and brazen it out. The mention of his brother's name will make him suspect that the worthy Tom has let it all out. He will run away, and we must stop him."

John wasted no time in going to the office of Batterick and Baldwin, but drove straight to Pringle's address; rightly judging that, if he was going to escape, he would probably take the very first opportunity of getting away from the City. So it came to pass that, when Samuel had finished his packing and was joyously bringing his portmanteau from his bedroom, he found this pair of conspirators ready to receive him; and the shock was so great that he fairly swooned away. When he recovered, he found himself lying on the horse-hair sofa which decorated his apartment. His head was dizzy and heavy, and it was some minutes before he remembered what had happened, and where he was. Then he sat up and realised the position.

"Innocent? Then God forgive us all!"

The words rang in his brain. Who were those who chiefly needed forgiveness? And by what suffering was that forgiveness to be arrived at? He clutched the head of the sofa, and groaned in his misery.

Before him stood John Wybrow, looking hard, stern, and pitiless; and at the table sat the young lady he had seen in Mr. Baldwin's private room, and her eyes too meant punishment.

"Now, Pringle," said Wybrow, "you have had a fright at the office; you have come here with the intention of running away to escape arrest; we have caught you in the act of packing your portmanteau; and we do not intend you to run away. Not yet."

The miserable man's lips were parted, and his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth.

"Not yet," repeated John.

"What—what am I to do? Why do you stop me? What business is it of yours?" asked Pringle, hardly knowing what he said.

"Surely you know what you have to do?" said Helen, in her low, steady voice.

Pringle shook his head.

"Here is paper." John opened a desk and took out some sheets. "Here is ink. Here is a pen. Will you write a full account of it, now at once, or shall I send for a policeman?"

"Spare me!" cried the abject criminal. "Mr. Wybrow, what business is it of yours? Young lady, what have you got to do with an old story, eight years old? It all happened when I was a boy, very little more than a boy. I have never been happy since, not one single day. Is not my misery enough punishment? Other clerks can go about and be cheerful, and enjoy their victuals. But that thing never lets me alone, not once, not one single day. Why should I suffer more?"

It never occurred to his disordered brain that they really had no proofs of his guilt. He assumed at once that all was known, and they had the power of giving him into custody on the charge of forgery, aggravated by the fact that he had allowed another to be convicted of his own crime.

"We shall not spare you," said John. "We know now the reason of your nervousness and hesitation. Spare you? Samuel Pringle, of all men living on this earth, there is not one who is not worthy to be spared before you. In all the prisons in the world there is not a criminal so blackhearted as yourself. They have done the things for which they are in prison; you have not only done the things, but you have deliberately sent an innocent man to gaol for your crime."

Samuel buried his face in his hands.

"The convict's dress you have made George Warneford wear, you shall wear yourself; the misery you have brought on him, you shall feel yourself, and worse: the disgrace which lies upon him and his shall be transferred to you and yours. Your name shall be a byword of execration and reproach. People who bear it shall be ashamed to have such a name."

Then Samuel Pringle cried and wept; he rolled his head

upon the pillow and wished he was dead; he moaned and whined, he declared that he repented, that he always had repented, that there was no man in the world more repentant than himself; and then, because no answer came, but every time that he raised his eyes he met the relentless gaze of John Wybrow and the steady look of Helen Elwood, he crawled on his knees to the latter, and, seizing her hand, implored her to forgive him, and to let him go.

"You are a woman," he said. "Women are tender and pitiful. They always forgive. What good will it do George Warneford if the story does come out? He is out of prison. I learned that from my brother some three years ago. Tom saw him at Melbourne, walking about. It won't do him any good; and oh! think of what it will be for me!"

Helen drew her hand away, but made no response. What indeed, could she say?

"Mr. Wybrow is hard and cruel. Oh, much harder than I should be if Mr. Wybrow was in my place." He looked up furtively at his enemy, who stood motionless, with the pen in his hand. "Many a time have I done Mr. Wybrow's work for him in the office, and said nothing about it. Speak to him, young lady. You've got a kind heart, I know you have. Speak to him for me. Tell him that I will go straight away out of London, and he shall never see me again, since he hates me so. Straight away at once I will go; and as for George Warneford, if he has got out of prison, what more does he want? Putting me in won't do him any good. Besides," he threw this out as a last shot, partly, perhaps as a feeler, "besides, he's dead, I'm sure he's dead. Don't persecute a poor repentant sinner—don't be unchristian. Think of your own sins—not that you've got any, but perhaps Mr. Wybrow has—little ones, not big ones like mine—and then think how you'd feel if you had such a crime as I have weighing on your mind, and taking the taste out of everything you put into your mouth."

"Now, Pringle," interrupted John Wybrow, "we have had enough whining; stand up and write at this table."

Samuel obeyed, so far as standing up went. It was a

groggy sort of standing at the best, and he felt, if he felt anything at all, that he hardly looked his best, for his long legs bent beneath him, his thin and sandy hair was hanging over his forehead, his lean arms hung helplessly at his sides, and his eyes were red and swollen. He looked at his port-manteau and at the door, but between the door and himself stood the stalwart form of John Wybrow. Samuel Pringle was neither a strong man nor a brave man. If the thought of forcible departure entered his head it was dismissed at once.

"Sit down," said John peremptorily.

Samuel sat down.

"Take the pen."

Samuel took the pen, and mechanically drew the paper before him.

"Now write."

"What am I to write?" he asked.

"Write the truth," said Helen.

"Write what I dictate," said John.

Samuel made a last effort.

"If I write," he said imploringly, "give me a chance of escape afterwards."

Helen looked at John Wybrow. The criminal caught the glance.

"Only a single chance; give me a day, to get away if I can," Pringle pleaded.

"Write first," said John Wybrow. "I will make no conditions till I have got a confession."

Pringle dipped the pen in the ink.

John began to dictate:

"I, Samuel Pringle."

"I, Samuel Pringle."

"Will you kindly look over his shoulder, Miss Elwood?" John was trying to frame a form of words which should at least be binding. The difficulty was that he really knew nothing, and had nothing to go upon but his own strong suspicions. After a few moments of hesitation he began again. Helen stood behind the trembling clerk, on whose forehead the beads of agony gathered fast.

"I, Samuel Pringle, now a clerk of ten years' standing in the house of Batterick & Baldwin."

"Batterick & Baldwin," repeated Pringle.

"Declare and confess that the forgery for which George Warneford was tried, eight years ago, and sentenced to twenty years of penal servitude, was not committed by him at all."

"O Lord," groaned the writer, "'not committed by him at all.'"

"That he was entirely innocent of the offence; that it was committed without his knowledge; that he was wrongly found guilty; that the real criminal is still at large."

"Still at large," said Pringle. "Oh, miss, help him to stay at large. Help a poor, miserable, repentant man."

But Helen's face showed no pity. The abject nature of the man filled her with disgust.

"Still at large. That the other forgeries and embezzlements laid to George Warneford's charge were one and all the work of the same man, who has hitherto escaped punishment."

"Escaped punishment!" the clerk echoed. "Oh, young lady, help him to escape altogether. It can't do George Warneford any good to see him punished. He's dead now. I know he's dead, else he would have come home."

"I further declare that the real forger——"

"I can't write it!" ejaculated the man. "Mr. Wybrow, let me run away, let me escape, let me go this once. It's pitiful to have a giant's strength, sir, as Shakespeare says, and it's unchristian to use it. O Mr. Wybrow! what are we if we are not Christians?"

"That the real forger was myself, and no other."

Helen placed the pen in the nerveless fingers from which it had dropped.

"Write the words," she said.

"I can't, I can't. It's all true, as you know, Mr. Wybrow; but I can't write the words. I feel as if they were sentencing me to a prison."

"Very likely they will," said John. "But confession is better than detection, as you will find. Come, you have no choice."

With a heavy groan he obeyed.

"Myself! O Lord! O Lord! What have I written?"

"Sign it now."

Reluctantly he signed the paper.

"Now, Miss Elwood," said John, "we two will witness this signature."

It was Helen's turn to tremble when she signed her name as one of the witnesses. For what did it mean to her, this scrap of paper? The self-respect of her lover, the restitution of his good name; the recovery of all that made life dear; the bearing back to George of her golden sheaves; a victory worth to her all the other victories in the world!

She signed. The wretched man went on whining and pleading in the same key about repentance, about the wicked waste of trouble in raking up old matters, about the certain death of George Warneford; but his words fell unheeded on her ears. She was thinking only about the joy and thankfulness which should be theirs, when she bore back to George the paper, so precious to them all.

John folded up the paper and laughed. "We have won, Miss Elwood," he said. "You shall tell me afterwards, if you will, what you have won. You know what is my prize."

Then he turned to Pringle, and his voice changed—

"If I had words—if there were words in the language to express the unutterable loathing and disgust that I feel for you, I would use them. But there are no words strong enough. You have signed, however. We have you now utterly in our power. If you are to expect anything at all from us—the slightest mercy—you will tell us the whole story without evasion or concealment. Out with it!"

"You will be merciful, then?" said Pringle, as he saw the paper folded in John's pocket-book, and deposited in a place of safety. "If I tell you particulars that you would not get from any one else, you will have a little pity? Think of it, Mr. Wybrow, a whole life spent in prison. If I thought it would be only ten years, I should not mind so much. But a life! never to get out again; never to be free; never to do what I like; never to be without the dreadful

convict dress! Oh, I've dreamed of it night after night till I know it all by heart, and the misery of it. O Mr. Wybrow, be merciful!"

"Sit down again, and tell us, in as few words as you can, the whole history."

Does the story need to be told at length? The situation is known. A weak and cowardly lad, in the hands of his unscrupulous brother, was made to do anything. A cheque-book was purloined and kept in a safe place by Tom: from time to time, whenever the opportunity seemed favourable, a cheque was drawn with the name of the firm forged so skilfully that the signature was passed without the slightest suspicion. Detection was difficult, because the crafty Tom took charge of the cheques; Samuel, needless to say, getting nothing of the proceeds, but obedient partly from habit and partly from compulsion.

"But the cheque, the last cheque; how did that get into the envelope?"

"I put it there," said Samuel. "Tom told me to. I overheard Mr. Baldwin talking to the manager of the bank; I knew that the forgeries were going to be found out; I watched from where I sat; I could see Mr. Baldwin through a corner of the curtain; I saw him draw a cheque and place it in an envelope. That was the day before Warneford was caught. He left the envelope on the table. I put the last cheque I had forged in another envelope exactly like his own. I made an excuse for going into his office—I changed the envelopes. Tom said it was the best chance to throw suspicion on somebody else. How should we know that George Warneford would be the one on whom it would fall? It was not our fault. We had to look out for ourselves—Tom and I. Mr. Baldwin locked up the envelope when he went away; he clean forgot who had been in his room; he forgot, too, that he left his desk for a moment when I was in his office, and he swore positively that no one could have touched that envelope, except himself and George Warneford. Tom was in court when he swore it, and when Tom told me in the evening, we laughed—that is, Tom laughed till the tears ran down his face."

Helen made an involuntary gesture of disgust.

"He laughed, miss, not me. I repented. I repented at once, and the money—hundreds of pounds it was—that Tom had through me, never did him any good. I always told him it wouldn't. Oh, it's a dreadful story; and somehow, Mr. Wybrow, now that I've told you the whole of it, I feel easier in my mind."

John Wybrow whispered a few words to Helen, then he turned to the man again.

"Look here: you have told us, I believe, pretty well the whole truth. Of course we don't believe a word about your repentance, and all that. Repentance, indeed! But you have done us, involuntarily, a service. Now, in return, Miss Elwood, this young lady"—Samuel Pringle bowed, as if he were being introduced to her—"has consented to one act of grace."

"And the act of grace, sir?"

"The act of grace is this. You shall have twenty-four hours' start; after that time a warrant will be taken out for your arrest, and you will take your punishment if you are caught. The punishment will be heavy, and I sincerely hope you will be caught. Now go."

He pointed to the door.

Samuel Pringle seized his portmanteau and vanished. Looking out of the window they saw him running down the street till he caught a cab, in which he drove away.

"There will be no warrant in his case, I suspect, Miss Elwood. We must now——"

"Wait a moment," she cried. "My heart is too full. Tell me," she said after a pause, "tell me, does this confession quite, quite free George from all suspicion?"

"It does. I am no lawyer, but I am certain that it does. It will at least clear him in the eyes of Mr. Baldwin and the world. Miss Elwood, you have helped me to a wife. Let us go to Ruth."

"Not yet," she said; "I want to get at the other man first, and I must wait. I want your advice and help. My brain is troubled with joy. Let us keep this thing to ourselves for

one day yet—only one day. And to-morrow is Christmas Eve. Let Ruth keep that feast with a joyful heart.”

“And I must not see Ruth till to-morrow evening?”

“Not till to-morrow evening, John Wybrow. If you cannot wait for four-and-twenty hours, what will you think of me when I tell you that I have waited for three years?”

“You, Miss Elwood!”

“Yes; George Warneford and I. That is my secret. You have won a wife and a sister too, because I am to be married to George Warneford.”

John took her hand and kissed it. On second thoughts he stooped and kissed her on the forehead.

“You will be our sister?” he said simply. “I am very glad. Where is George?”

“He is here in London. That is another of my secrets. He is at the professor’s with me——”

“In the same house as Ruth?”

“In the same house as Ruth, and she does not know. Once she thought she knew his voice, but it passed off. He is with me as my brother, so that we can travel together. Ruth does not suspect. But to-morrow she shall know.”

John took her home. In the front room the gas was lit, for the professor was instructing a select class. Behind the blinds was Ruth, but John did not know this, and went away with a longing, hungry heart.

George Warneford was pacing the room impatiently. He stopped with a gesture of inquiry when Helen returned.

“Yes, George, I have seen Mr. Baldwin, and have talked with him, and—and——Oh! my dear, dear love, we who have waited so long, can we not wait a little longer?”

She fell weeping into his arms. He soothed her, and caressed her, and presently she lifted her head and raised her eyes.

“Let us remember,” she said, “the long and weary time of trial, and, with the remembrance, let us think of all that it has done for us; how it cleared away the clouds of anger and revenge which lay on your soul; how it brought you back to your better self, the man I learned to know; how

it made me a little less selfish and a little more careful of others; how it brought me the dearest and best thing that can happen to a woman—the love of a good man!”

“Nay, dear,” he said, “but the love of a man who would fain be all that his wife thinks him.”

“Why, that is it,” she said. “You think me fair and pure, and I try to be fair and pure of heart. I think you noble, and you make your own nobleness out of love for me. What is love worth, except to lead man and woman upward to the higher life?”

Then they were silent, and presently the old sailor stole in and joined them, without a word.

“George,” she said, after a little—they were sitting, according to their old custom, side by side before the fire: Ben Croil was in his place, with his head against the wall—“George, what day is this?”

“It is the day before Christmas Eve.”

“I remember that day three years ago, George. There were three people on a little islet together. It was a summer evening there, and they sat on the beach watching the golden sunset, as it painted the sands upon the beach and the rock behind them, where the white streamer floated night and day. They had been four months on that islet, where they were to be prisoners for three years. All their hearts were troubled with a sense of wrong. The older man was yearning for revenge upon the mutineers and murderers who had brought them there.”

“He was,” said Ben. “He’s yearning still; but he’s going to have his revenge before long.”

“The younger man,” said Helen, in her soft low voice, “was longing for revenge on the man who had brought him to ruin. Was he not, George?”

“He was,” said George.

“What does he think now?”

“He would leave him—to Helen,” replied her lover, taking her hand.

“And Helen would leave him—to Heaven,” she said. “The day before Christmas Eve, Ben—this is a time when we ought to put away all sorts of revenge.”

"Ay, ay, Miss Helen, that's very true; bless you, I don't harbour no malice against no one—except Boston Tom. He's got to swing, then I shall be at peace with all mankind."

"We must forgive, if we can, even Boston Tom," she said.

"What! forgive a mutineer and a murderer, when I've got him under my thumb?"

The old man was inflexible on this point. That Boston Tom should be allowed to escape never entered his head. It was, if anything, a part of the great scheme of Christian forgiveness, that hanging should come first and pardon afterwards. And the knowledge that he had caught him at last, tended greatly to soothe his soul, and prepared him for a fuller enjoyment of that season when peace and goodwill are specially preached to the nations of the earth.

Helen ceased to urge her point. But another pleader took up the cause of Boston Tom. It was a second letter from Rupert, written in pencil and in haste:—

"Whatever you have to do with this man," he wrote to Helen, "must be done quickly. I think he is dying. Last night, after drinking enough rum to float a three-decker, or at least one of old Ben's favourite craft, and after coughing till he shook the walls of the house, he broke a blood-vessel. We put him to bed, and he went on drinking rum. I was with him all night. I think, Miss Elwood, that I am getting rather tired of playing my part. The place is a den of thieves. The five pounds are already nearly gone, and the woman of the house is throwing out hints that more will be wanted before long. Also I am expected to dance all the evening to please the sailors. After all, there is some fun in showing these timber-toed lubbers what dancing really means. But I'm afraid that Dan Mizen suspects me; he is always on the watch.

R. L.

"*P.S.*—They have had a doctor to see him. He reports that the patient can't last more than twenty-four hours. The woman has carried off his clothes, and I caught her searching the pockets. Also Dan Mizen has been making observations about captures and such things. My own idea is that he is

trying to make something for himself out of the man's death. Act at once if there is anything to be done."

Helen read this letter aloud and waited for a response, looking to George first.

He thought for a minute.

"If the man's testimony is to be of any use to us," he said, "it must be got at once."

"We can do without it, George, but we shall be stronger with it."

"Then I will go myself and get it out of him."

Helen turned to Ben. "What do you think, Ben?"

He was putting on his overcoat.

"Think?" he asked, with impatience glittering in his pale blue eyes. "What is a man to think? Here's the murderer going to cheat the gallows, and no one to interfere but me. Think? Why, that we must go to the nearest police-station and arrest him, dead or alive."

"We will go, Ben, you and I. No, George"—she put him back gently as he rose to go with her—"it isn't altogether my fancy, but I want to finish this work myself with Ben and our friends. I want you to remain where you are, unknown and unsuspected till the time comes."

"The time, the time! O Helen! I cannot believe the time will ever come!"

"It has come, George; it is here already. Have patience for a single day—only a single day—and you will find that it has really come for you, and for Ruth, and for me. My heart is very full, dear friend; but the work is nearly done, and this night, please God, will finish it. Do not wait for me, I am safe with Ben and Rupert."

It was nine o'clock. As Helen opened the door a van drove up, and a man, jumping down, began to hand out parcels.

"Here you are, miss," he said. "Name, Lemire."

"I will call Madame Lemire. Please bring in the things."

The professor came, Madame being out on a little Christmas marketing.

"Turkey for Mr. Lemire—sausages for Mr. Lemire—barrel of oysters, Mr. Lemire. That all right? Case of wine, Mr.

Lemire—box of French plums, Mr. Lemire—ditto, ditto, boxes of preserved fruit—bon-bons—one, two, three, five; that's right. Very sorry, sir, to be so late."

"But these can't be for me!" cried the bewildered professor.

"Quite right, sir—quite right; ordered two hours ago; nothing to pay. Stop a minute! Pheasant for Mr. Lemire—wild duck, Mr. Lemire—cod's head and shoulder, Mr. Lemire."

"But, my friend, I have ordered none of these things."

"Didn't say you had, sir. Friend, I suppose, ordered 'em all. Christmas-time, you know. Hamper besides; don't know what's in that hamper. Where's that box, Jim? We was told to take very particular care of that box. Here you are, sir—box for Mr. Lemire. Think that's all, sir. You'll have to sign here—so—and here's a letter."

By this time Ruth Warneford, Antoinette, and the children were gathered in the little hall gazing at the treasures which lay piled one above the other, cumbering the way. The professor, balancing himself on his toes, gesticulated, laughed, and remonstrated. But before they knew what had happened, the man with the van had driven off and they were left with their boxes.

"But what does it mean? Is it St. Nicolas? Is it the good Christmas fairies? Is it a gift of Heaven?" and the professor was helpless. "My dear young lady," he addressed Helen, "I assure you, on the word of an artist, that the resources of the establishment at this moment go no farther than the prospect of a leg of mutton, without plum-pudding, for Christmas Day. You will hardly believe me, but that is the fact; and my wife has now gone out with Gaspard in the hope of purchasing that leg at a reasonable cost; and here are turkey, sausages, oysters, pheasant, wild duck, wine—apparently champagne, vin de champagne!—French plums, fruits, cod-fish, bon-bons. Children, children, you are about to taste unheard-of luxuries. It is a return into Egypt."

"And the box, father. What is in the box?"

Ben produced that knife of his, which, when not in active

service in cutting tobacco, was useful as a screw driver, or a crow-bar, or a marlin-spike, or a hammer, or as any implement likely to be required on board a sailing-ship. With the help of this he opened the box. The contents were covered with paper.

"Stop, stop!" said Nettie. "This is too delicious. Let us carry everything into the class-room."

All the things made a gallant show on the bare floor—such a picture as might have been painted and hung upon the walls of some great banqueting-hall. It would have been called Christmas Plenty in the Olden Time. The game lay in an inner circle, surrounded by the boxes of fruit and the cases of wine. The barrel of oysters formed a sort of tower in the centre, and the children were gathered round the mysterious box, over which Helen stood as guard.

All was silence while she opened the first parcel.

It was wrapped in tissue paper, as costly things should be, and on it was a card, "For Nettie." Opened, it proved to contain a winter jacket of the very finest and best. The next was marked, "For Charlotte." That contained a brand-new dress, warm and soft; and so with all the rest. For the girls, dresses; and for each of the boys—the parcels being labelled, "For Gaspard, care of his father," and so on—a bank-note white and crisp.

Never was such a Christmas present.

"But nothing at all for Ruth?" cried Nettie. "O Ruth! it is a shame!"

"Had you not better read your letter, professor?" asked Helen.

"Ah, to be sure. The letter! the letter! Now it is strange that I should have forgotten the letter. Gaspard, my son, take the violin. So. Come, here is the letter, children."

Instead of reading it aloud, and at once, he began by solemnly taking Ruth's hand and raising it to his lips with the courtesy of the "ancien régime."

"Listen, children. This is all the letter:—

"'For those who love Ruth, and have been kind to her.'"

"That is all, children, that is all." The professor blew his nose. "Always a blessing to us, from the day when God's providence brought her to our home—always the sunshine of our house."

"No, no!" cried Ruth. "You have been my parents, my family—all to me."

"It is from her earnings," the professor went on, "from her poor earnings, that our Christmas fare was to have come; because, I confess to you, Mademoiselle Elwood, that art is not remunerative in this quarter. But, pardon, mademoiselle, you were going out when these grand things arrived. You have delayed yourself on our account."

"Yes, I have to go out for an hour. Come, then, good-night, Nettie; good-night, children all. I am sure you deserve all the good fortune that can befall you."

Ruth ran after her.

"Helen, tell me what do you think it means? Is it John? Do you think it is John?"

"My dear, perhaps it is John. Do you remember the promise in the church."

"Do I remember? Ah, Helen, can I forget?"

Helen hurried away, but as she opened the door she heard the professor strike up a cheerful note.

"Now, children all! The joyful dance of the Happy round the Monument of Plenty. Mademoiselle Antoinette will commence. Where, oh, where is Rupert?"

And when Madame Lemire returned, bringing with her the humble leg of mutton, she found the children executing one of the professor's highest conceptions—a Pastoral piece—round such a display of splendid things as even Leaden-hall Market could not surpass.

CHAPTER X.

BEN HAS HIS REVENGE.

OUT in the cold December evening Helen and Ben walked through the streets, crowded with the late buyers in the Christmas markets. The old man was silent, thinking over his baffled hopes of justice. It was a bitter pill for him to swallow. After all these years, in which every day brought before him in stronger colours the blackness of the treachery which lost the *Lucy Derrick*, and destroyed so many lives; and after finding his enemy, the last and worst of the whole mutinous crew, to learn first that Christian forgiveness might have to include even that desperate villain, and then that a more potent hand of justice than even British law was taking him away from his grasp—all this was too much for the good old man. Helen divined his thoughts, and tried to lead them back to other matters. “You will be rejoiced, Ben, to see Mr. Warneford’s good name restored, will you not?”

“Ay, ay, Miss Helen. Not that it makes any difference to him, nor to you, nor to me neither, in so far as my respects is concerned. Boston Tom is at the bottom of that villainy too.”

“He was, Ben, and if he is on his deathbed we must forgive him that as well as the greater crime.”

Ben made no answer.

They came into Whitechapel High Street, all ablaze with gaslight, and presently arrived at the house.

The door was open, but there was no one in the front room, where Rupert had been wont of late to entertain roystering Jack and his friends with an exhibition of his art. No one in the passage, no one on the stairs—all was dark and silent.

They waited. What to do next? and where to go?

Presently they heard a voice upstairs, and footsteps.

Ben listened.

“That’s Master Rupert,” he said. “Follow close to me, Miss Helen.”

The room was lit by a single gas-jet, flaring high, like one

of those which decorated the butchers' stalls outside. It was an old-fashioned wainscoted room, but the paint was thick with dirt, and the ceiling, which had once, perhaps, been whitewashed, was blackened with smoke and grimed with age. It was furnished with a low, rickety wooden bed, and with a couple of chairs—nothing else, not even a washstand or a table. And on the bed, propped up by pillows, sat Boston Tom. He was dying; his cheeks were white and sunken; the old wound at the side of his lip showed red and ghastly against the deathly pallor of his cheek; his hair lay over his low, receding forehead; round his shoulders was thrown an old pea-jacket; and in his trembling fingers he held a tumbler half full of rum.

He looked round and saw his visitors, with a curious smile.

"Ben Croil, is it?" he gasped; "old Ben Croil, the Bo's'n. Thought you was dead, mate. Thought you was cast away in the captain's gig—you and the young lady and George Warneford. Glad you're not; that makes three less—every little counts. Three less; bully for you, Boston Tom."

He raised the tumbler to his lips, and would have let it fall in his weakness, but for Rupert, his sole companion, who held it for him while he drank, with a look half of apology and half of recognition at Helen and Ben.

"It is all we can do for him now," he explained.

"Does he know it?" whispered Helen. "Does he know his condition?"

The man, who had closed his eyes for a moment, opened them and bestowed a wink upon her which saved the trouble of speech.

How to address this man? How to touch with the slightest spark of human feeling a heart so callous and so seared?

Ben Croil saved her the trouble of consideration. He stepped to the foot of the bed and gazed steadfastly in the face of his enemy.

"At last I've found you," he said.

"Ay, mate, you've found me, and none too soon. Guess I'll save my neck yet." He spoke with an effort, but there was the determination of keeping it up to the end in his face.

"Where's that rope you spoke about, bo's'n?" he went on. "Cheated you, after all. Boston Tom's booked. Look ye here, mate, all of them fellows is dead and gone, every man Jack of them. Some of 'em drowned; some of 'em cut up for food when we took to the boats; some of 'em food for sharks. Youngster, give me hold of that bottle." He took a pull at the rum and went on, after a fit of coughing which might have killed an ostrich. "Ugh, it's this cough that prevents me from talking; prop me up a bit more, boy. So, Ben, you're done this time."

"Say you're sorry, mate," said Ben, in whose mind, touched by the sight of the forlorn wretch, Helen's teaching suddenly sprang up full blown into charity. "Say you're sorry."

"What's the use of that?" asked the impenitent murderer. "That won't bring back the *Lucy Derrick*. Of course I'm sorry. Who wouldn't be sorry with nothing but the gallows or the black box? Sorry!" Then he turned to Rupert. "See, boy, you're a trump; you've looked after me when all the lot bolted; you're the one as has stuck to me these days, and never let me want for nothing. So I'll give you all I've got left, and that's a word of advice. If you go to sea, don't you go mutineering, and keep your hands from slaughtering captain and mates. Then you'll live to be a credit to your family."

"Are you sorry for nothing else, Thomas Pringle?" Helen asked.

"Lots," he replied. "Lots. Buckets full. But, then, Thomas Pringle is gone for many a year, and Boston Tom's took his place."

"In the case of George Warneford, now the man who escaped with me in the boat——"

"Ay, ay. I remember well; that was a bad job, that was."

"I know all about it," said Helen; "your brother Samuel told me."

"Did he, now?" Boston Tom asked the question with an air of keen interest. "Did he really? I did used to tell him that if he ever split on that job I'd take him out some dark

night—say Hampstead Heath way—and brain him ; so I would have done, too, three years ago. Suppose it's no use thinking of that now ; can't be done."

"All about it," continued Helen. "Samuel forged the cheque at your instigation."

"So he did, so he did ; that's a fact. I wanted the money bad ; very bad I wanted the money at that time. Warneford got it hot, and I laughed."

"Samuel has written a confession of the whole," Helen went on ; "but I want your confession."

"Then, my lady, you won't get it ; so you may go away again and leave me here till the time's up. More rum, my lad."

He lay back after his effort, and closed his eyes, exhausted. He opened his eyes again after a few minutes, and uttered, with great enjoyment—

"Catch a weasel asleep ! If Sam has confessed, that's all you want ; if he hasn't, you don't catch me napping."

"He has confessed, indeed," said Helen. "Do you think I would bring you an untruth now, of all times in the world ?"

He shook his head.

"There's one thing more to be said, Boston Tom," Ben struck in. "'Tis a small matter, this old forging business ; and if Miss Elwood wants your name at the foot of a bit of paper, you may as well put it there. Murder's different, and by George, if you don't do what she asks, I'll step out and fetch a policeman. If you can't be hanged, you shall sit in a cell without the rum."

"Give me another drop, boy."

"Let be, let be !" said Ben, interposing and snatching the bottle from Rupert. "Not another drop shall you have until you've made that there confession."

The dying man stretched out his hands with a gesture of despair.

"Not the rum !" he cried, "not the rum. Take anything away, but leave me that. You, boy ; you're stronger than him ; fight him for it ; tear it out of his hands : make him give it up to you. Up, boy, and fight him !"

But, to his surprise, the boy joined his enemies.

"You shall have your rum," he said, "when you have signed the paper."

Then he lost his courage, and began to moan and whine exactly like his brother Samuel.

"I'll sign anything," he said, "if you will give me the bottle."

Helen wrote rapidly. She had all the facts, and wanted nothing but a simple declaration. In a few minutes she was ready.

"Listen now. Tell me if this is all you have to say—

"I, the undersigned, believing myself to be dying, solemnly declare that the forgery for which George Warneford, clerk to the house of Batterick & Baldwin, was convicted and sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude was committed by my brother, Samuel Pringle, clerk in the same firm. I also declare that the whole of the forgeries, of which that was the last, were by the same Samuel Pringle. They were committed at my own instigation, and for my own profit; I had the spending of the money, and Samuel Pringle, my brother, never touched a penny of it. George Warneford knew nothing about it from the beginning to the end.'"

"That's about all," said Thomas Pringle. "I've nothing more to say; it's quite time; give me the bottle."

"Not yet," said Ben. "Take time—so! Now sign as well as you can."

Helen guided the fingers while the signature of Boston Tom slowly drew itself across the bottom of the page; then the pen fell from his hand, and Boston Tom's head fell back upon the pillow. For a while they thought him dead, but he was not; he opened his eyes and motioned for the rum, which Rupert held to his mouth.

"Leave me to the boy," he sighed wearily.

While they thus looked on at this miserable ending of a shameful life, there was a noise below, and steps were heard upon the stairs. The door opened, and Dan'l Mizen appeared; behind him two policemen.

"There he is, gentlemen," said the ex-ship's-boy eagerly.

"There he is! That's Boston Tom, the ringleader of the murderers. And, oh! here's Mr. Croil, gentlemen." He turned to the policemen. "Bear witness for me I'm the first to give information. I'm Queen's evidence. I'm the one that came forward first."

"Thomas Pringle, *alias* Boston Tom," said one of the policemen, "I've got a warrant for you. It's mutiny and murder on the high seas; and remember, what you say now may be used against you in evidence."

Boston Tom raised his dying head, and looked about him, trying to recollect.

"It's all a dream," he said. "What's gone before in the dream? You're Bo's'n Croil; you are old Ben. I know you. There's Dan Mizen. We're all honest men here, play fair and square, drink square and fair, pay up and play again. Pass the rum, my boy."

And with these words Boston Tom laid his head back upon the pillow and closed his eyes. They waited for five minutes. He did not open his eyes. One of the constables took his hand and felt his pulse. The hand was cold and the pulse had stopped.

He had gone before another Judge.

CHAPTER XI.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

THE next day was a day of mystery. Miss Elwood had a long talk in the morning with Madame Lemire and Antoinette, the result of which was a great crying of all three, followed by mighty preparations, the like of which had never before been witnessed in Yendo Street.

It was holiday with the professor; but he, too, conscious of impending change, roamed restlessly from one of the two rooms to the other.

Ruth stole out after breakfast, accompanied by Charlotte, and took refuge in the church, where she had her organ to attend to till dinner time. When she returned, she too felt

that it was a very curious and mysterious day. Old Ben, who, like the rest, was restless and disturbed, opened the door and poked his head in just to say, in a hoarse whisper—

“It is all right at last, miss. Heart up, pretty,” and then he disappeared.

Nettie, too, came rushing up from the kitchen once in every quarter of an hour, just on purpose to kiss and hug her; and then, after a pirouette or two of wonderful dexterity, rushed downstairs again and disappeared.

And then the professor came and sat with her—the kind professor, her devoted friend. He too was silent and restless; he could not sit still, he fidgeted on his chair, he stood on his toes, he danced on his elastic feet from one end of the room to the other, and then, before finally dancing out—which he did after half an hour of this performance—he took Ruth’s head in his hands, and kissed her on the forehead.

And when he was gone, Ruth felt that he had dropped a tear upon her brow. For everybody now, except the children and herself, knew the whole story. They knew now what it all meant, the mystery of all this coming and going; they knew now the reason why this mysterious couple, this so-called brother and sister, had sought out these obscure lodgings in the unknown region of America Square. Helen, before going out on her errand of victory that morning, had told Madame Lemire the whole story. Therefore Nettie and her mother had a good cry, and cried at intervals during the whole day, insomuch that the grand culinary operations were as much wept over as if they had been intended for the cold meats of a funeral banquet. They told Charlotte, and Charlotte, after telling Gaspard and Rupert, crept upstairs and sat on a footstool, with Ruth’s hand in hers, thinking what a wonderful story it was; and then, because we all want to have a little of our own interest in everything, realised how dull the days would be without Ruth to cheer them up.

“Tell me what it means, Charlotte,” said Ruth. “What is the matter with everybody? Is it on account of the mysterious Christmas present?”

Charlotte shook her head.

"Better than that," she said. "That means only feasting. Far better than that; something very, very good, Ruth—something that will make us all happy; because it will make you happy. Think of the very best that could happen to you, the very best, you know—not a silly wish, not something, you know, for to-day or to-morrow, but for always—and then be quite sure you will have it; and more—yes, more."

The afternoon dragged on, and the early evening brought blindman's holiday. Then the children came flocking in, to sit round the fire and talk, as was their usual custom, with Ruth Warneford to tell them stories. But she told them none that evening, because she was anxious and disturbed.

Presently, one by one, the rest came in. The professor, without his violin, balancing himself on tiptoe; Nettie and Madame dressed as for some unusual ceremony, and with looks of great mystery. The boys came in too, Rupert and Gaspard—the former with folded arms and a certain melodramatic gloom, the latter bursting with the importance of having a real and wonderful secret to tell.

The elders tried to talk, but it was no use. Conversation flagged, and a damper was thrown on any more efforts by the sudden breaking out into sobs and tears of Madame Lemire. When Nettie and Charlotte followed, and all three fell to kissing Ruth and crying over her at the same time, the professor, followed by his two eldest sons, retired to the classroom, whence presently issued the well-known strains of the violin, accompanied by sounds indicating that, with his two sons, the professor was seeking consolation in Art. As for the children, all this crying, with the house full of the most enjoyable and hitherto undreamed of good things, seemed a kind of flying in the face of Providence; so that when, at six o'clock a carriage drove to the door it was a great relief. The professor returned and lit the gas, and the others formed a group involuntarily.

Helen was the first who entered, and she was followed by Mr. Baldwin and John Wybrow.

John Wybrow? Was it possible? Then this great thing was—was——

"My own dear, dear, dear Ruth," said John, quite naturally, holding her in his strong arms. "Don't cry, my darling. It is all right at last, and here is Mr. Baldwin to tell you so."

"We have done a great wrong, my dear," he said solemnly; "a very great wrong, and God forgive us for our hard hearts, and for our readiness to think evil. I am here to ask your pardon—very humbly to ask your pardon. Take her, John, and make her happy." He spoke as one deeply moved.

"And where, Miss Elwood, where——"

He looked round the room.

"Not here—come upstairs, Ruth dear, with me; Mr. Baldwin, and all of you—yes, all of you. Come, kind friends all. Ruth, there is one more surprise for you, and then we shall have finished."

She spoke with quivering lips, and led the way upstairs.

Her brother, standing impatiently before the fire, sprang to meet her.

"Yes, George," said Helen. "It is done. Ruth, dear, this is not my brother, but my betrothed: It is your own brother; your own brother George. Do you not remember him now? Yes, Ruth, your brother restored to you indeed, and his innocence established before all the world."

Then said Mr. Baldwin, who leaned upon John Wybrow while he spoke, and spoke very slowly—

"George Warneford," he said, "I have been thinking in the carriage what I should say to you, and could think of nothing; no, nothing that would express my sorrow and my joy."

George Warneford shook hands with him without a word. He could find no words; his sister was clinging to his neck, weeping the tears of joy and thankfulness, and his own heart was overcharged.

"I have sinned greatly," said Mr. Baldwin; "I was too ready to believe evil. I should have known all along that your father's son could not—could never have done that thing."

"Say no more, sir," said George; "let the past sleep; tell me only that you are quite and truly satisfied."

"I cannot let the past be forgotten, George. A great injury has been committed and a great reparation must follow; the reproaches that I have hurled at you in my thoughts for the last eight years have come back upon my own head; nothing can ever make me forget. You, kind friends," said the old man, turning to the professor and his family, who were gathered, not without an instinctive feeling as to artistic grouping, in the doorway, "who have entertained Ruth Warneford as one of yourselves, and have known her story all along, how shall we thank you? To-morrow is Christmas Day, but on the day following I shall proclaim George Warneford's innocence to all the people of the firm, and, in their presence, humbly ask this injured man for pardon."

"No, sir, no. My kind old master, there is nothing to forgive."

"John, my boy"—Mr. Baldwin turned to his nephew—"tell me what I ought to do."

"First ask George to let me marry Ruth," said John, holding out his hand.

"Granted at once," said George; "that is, if Ruth says Yes."

They shook hands, and the audience—the Lemires—clapped their hands and shouted.

"What next should I do, John?" asked Mr. Baldwin, wiping his eye-glasses with his handkerchief.

"The next thing you must do is to give away Helen Elwood on her wedding-day, which must be mine and Ruth's as well; and you must buy her the very handsomest present that you can think of; no curmudgeonly gift will do."

The audience clapped their hands again, approving this. John Wybrow, who was a practical man, then said there had been enough of tears.

"Ay, ay, John. What next?"

This time it was old Ben who stepped to the front and touched his grey old forelock.

"Beg pardon, sir, there's one that ought to be remembered. Who found out Boston Tom and sat by him night and day, so that he couldn't escape if he wished, and stuck to him?"

Stand for'ard, Master Rupert. That's the lad, sir. He wants to go to sea; give him a passage out and back in one of your own ships."

Mr. Baldwin shook hands with Rupert, now of a rosy hue.

"You shall have whatever you like to ask for, young gentleman, if I can give it."

Once more a round of applause from the family. By a dexterous movement of the right leg, Rupert gracefully stepped over their heads, and deposited himself in the background.

"And nothing for you, Mr. Croil?"

"Nothing for me, sir," said the old sailor. "I belong to Miss Helen."

"Anything else, John?" asked Mr. Baldwin, still unsatisfied.

"You ought to give desks in your office to as many of Mr. Lemire's sons as like to accept them; and, my dear uncle, the partnership which you promised to me, and which I threw over with so much bravado in the church——"

"It is yours, my boy, to begin from the new year."

"No, give it to George Warneford, as some reparation for his eight years of unmerited suffering."

"That will not be fair," said George.

But the audience clapped their hands again.

"Both of you, both of you," said Mr. Baldwin. "The firm can take in both. And what more, John?"

"Why, sir," said John, "I find that Madame Lemire would be delighted if we would all stay and take supper here; and I really think that, if the professor would allow such a thing, we might have a little dance downstairs before supper."

Again the audience clapped their hands, and there was a move to the class-room.

The professor took his violin of ceremony.

"Simple quadrille of four," he announced. "Mr. Warneford and Miss Elwood at the head, Mr. Wybrow and Miss Warneford for *vis-à-vis*."

He struck the floor with his foot and began to play. It

was a lame sort of quadrille at first, because two of the performers had tearful eyes, and would rather have sat in a corner. But John Wybrow knew what he was about, and what was best for everybody.

Then they had a waltz, and Rupert danced with Ruth, while John took Helen.

Then began the dancing of high Art, after this respect to social usage.

"Danse de Foie!" cried the professor. "Pas seul, Mademoiselle Lemire; pas de deux, Mademoiselle Lemire and Monsieur Rupert Lemire."

At eight, Madame Lemire announced that supper was ready, and they all filed in. Needless to tell of the splendours of this wedding feast; only, as they entered the room, an unexpected sight greeted their eyes. Rupert, holding a sword in his hands, was standing on the table, and, as they crowded in, executed a grand dance among the dishes, as difficult and as original as any Indian dance among eggs. And such was the love of the Lemire family for Art, that this spectacle gave them more delight and pride even than the pheasants and cold turkey, with champagne, which followed.

Mr. Baldwin, after supper, asked if he might propose a toast.

"Not the health and happiness of George Warneford and Ruth Warneford," he said; "that is deep in all our hearts. I propose that we drink the health of Professor Lemire, who is a good and a kind man, that we wish him all the success that he wishes for himself, and more; and that we thank him and his wife, and his children, one and all, for their faithful love and care of Ruth. Let us promise never to forget the great debt we owe him—a debt so heavy that no service could pay it off; a debt, my dear friends, which we would not pay off if we could. For in this house Ruth was received with love, and brought up in God-fearing ways of truth and religion, for you, George Warneford, and for us."

My story is told. You will see now, reader, who has told it. The writer is my wife—my Helen. Twenty years have

passed since that day, and we are old married people. Some of those who played their part in the drama have departed from us: old Ben is gone, and Mr. Baldwin; the professor, who caught a cold from going into the rain in his pumps, is gone too; his wife was not long in following him. The young Lemires, however, have done well. Rupert went out for his voyage, but, once in Melbourne, stopped there, and is there still. He is long since married, but he sends Ruth a present every year. His sister Nettie went on the stage as a danseuse, and after two or three years danced herself into the affections of a young fellow who only wanted a wife to make him the steadiest and best of men. She took care of all the younger branches, except Charlotte, who lives with Ruth Wybrow, and is a second mother to the children.

And as for me, I am the head of the firm of Batterick and Baldwin, the other partner being John Wybrow. Our chief clerk is Gaspard Lemire. I got the Queen's pardon, which was necessary, Mr. Baldwin said, for my complete restoration to the world; and I had the temporary annoyance of seeing my story told in the papers, and mangled in the telling too. I can never be too grateful for the recovery of my good name; but the thing for which I am most constantly and unceasingly grateful is for the gift of a perfect wife—the most divine gift that was ever vouchsafed to man.

THE END.

[November, 1887.]



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